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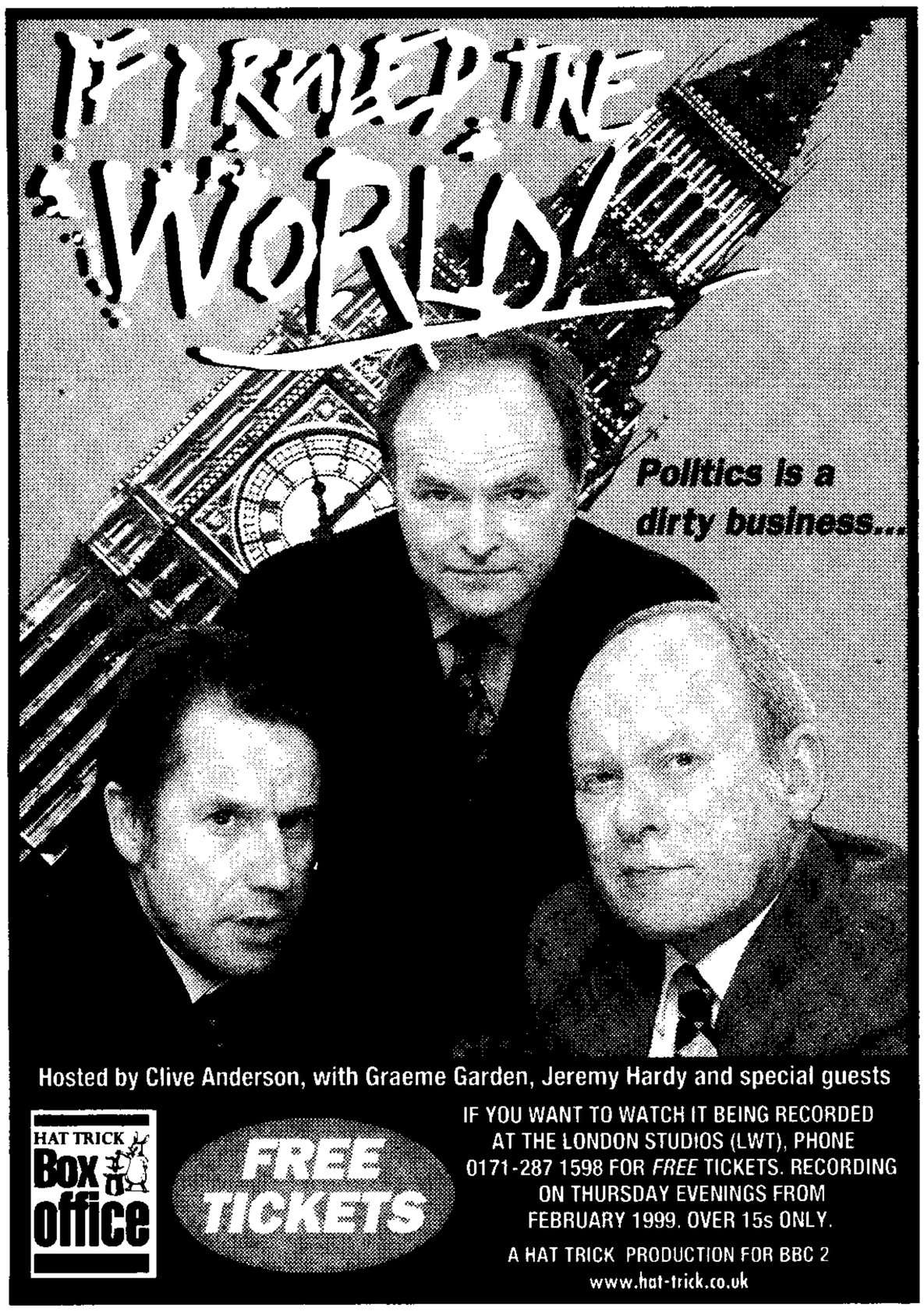

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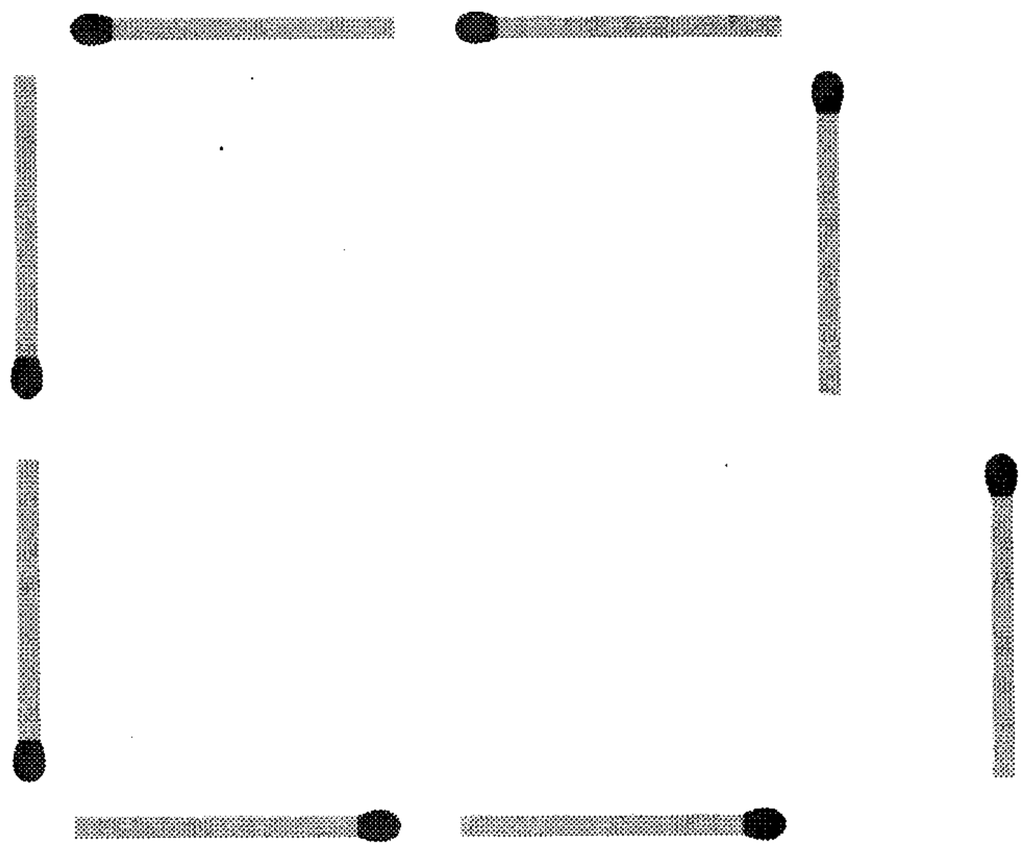

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Shortlist

1. **William Shakespeare**, over-rated Elizabethan dramatist who plagiarised other authors for his ideas.

2. **Sir Isaiah Newton**, over-rated 17th century physicist whose ideas about gravity have long since been discovered by everyone else.

3. **Charles Darwin**, over-rated bearded eccentric who believed that men were descended from fish.

4. **Lord Horatio Nelson**, over-rated one-armed admiral and adulterer who made improper advances to male crew members even on his death bed.

5. **Sir William Churchill**, over-rated British warmonger whose aggression in the 1940s cost Britain millions of lives.

6. **Lord Gnome**, under-rated millionaire publisher and philanthropist whose only aim is to bring happiness to the world.

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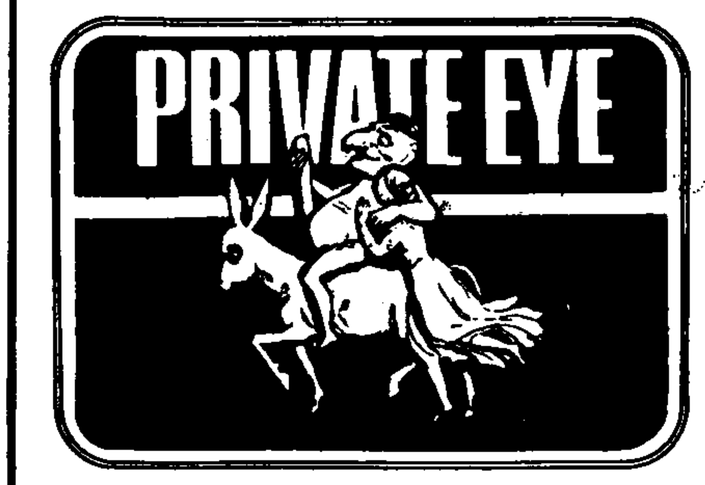


COLOUR SECTION

THE WAGES OF SPIN
Special report
pages 8 & 9

NEWS reports about the miserable holiday spent by thousands of Scottish householders who were without electricity as Scottish Power toiled for days to repair storm-damaged lines induced a certain *déjà vu* in north Wales and Cheshire, where 60,000 customers were similarly cut off after high winds brought down power lines on Christmas Eve 1997.

As in Scotland this time, many people in that area a year ago had their holidays ruined because freezers full of grub were spoiled after defrosting. Restaurants and pubs lost thousands of pounds at a busy time of year because they had no power and had to turn away bookings. But the local electricity company, Manweb, brushed off all demands for compensation from domestic and business customers. The cuts were caused by bad weather, a factor beyond its control, it said — the same case made this time by Scottish Power.

The electricity consumers' committee for Merseyside and north Wales was not impressed by this excuse, as the violent weather had only lasted a few hours. "Why did it take four days to reconnect the supply? If there weren't sufficient men, why didn't they have sufficient men?" asked committee chairman David Owen at the time.

Possibly because Manweb had sacked 1,350 workers when it was taken over in 1995 by, er, Scottish Power. The company which ruined Christmas for so many in Wales in 1997 did the same for Scotland in 1998. Fortunately Scottish Power's ongoing policy of "cost-cutting" ensured that its profits — unlike its power lines — held up: £640m in 1998.

A NOTABLE absentee from the new year honours list was Peter Penfold, the British high commissioner in Sierra Leone who sprang to fame during the Sandline affair. One can only hope he keeps his disappointment to himself this time: a year ago, his protest at being omitted from the list had disastrous consequences.

The story of Penfold's pique was first revealed in the *Eye* last June, when we suggested that it might explain one of the great unsolved mysteries of the arms-to-Sierra Leone debacle. Robin Cook was insisting that he knew nothing of any official connection with Sandline, while Penfold claimed that he had told the foreign office all about the impending counter-coup in a letter dated 30 December 1997.

"These apparently irreconcilable stories may both be true," we reported. For much of Penfold's letter was taken up with an extended grumble about his lack of reward in the new year honours list, and only after he had got this off his chest did he mention, as an afterthought, Sandline's plans to overthrow the government of Sierra Leone. When the message arrived in Whitehall, civil servants glanced at Penfold's whinge and tossed it aside — without noticing the rather important PS.

As no newspaper followed up our story, and it wasn't even mentioned in Sir Thomas Legg's official report on Sandline, readers may have assumed that we'd been sold a pup. Not so. A few weeks ago Penfold was summoned by the parliamentary foreign affairs committee, which has reopened its inquiries into the Sierra Leone affair, and the following unreported exchange took place between Andrew Mackinlay MP and the hapless high commissioner.

McKinlay: Can I go to the letter of 30 December? My understanding is that in this letter you expressed some dismay or disappointment or irritation that there was not a certain preferment in the new year's honours. That is correct, is it not?

Penfold: Yes.

Penfold then tried to explain why he had been so peeved. "It was not so much how I felt personally. Certainly my wife was very upset about it" Also, the four other members of his team at the high commission had all been honoured and "were embarrassed quite frankly that I had not received anything as well. That was why I was reflecting it in that letter."

Since Penfold's letter of 30 December is the most crucial single document in the whole Sandline saga, this remarkable admission is clearly worth pursuing. But the government, which is most annoyed with the foreign affairs committee for not letting sleeping scandals lie, thinks otherwise. Shortly before Christmas Mackinlay tabled a written question asking the foreign secretary "if an official of his department discussed with Mr Peter Penfold his department's consideration of the inclusion of Mr Penfold's name on the list of those proposed to receive honours in the new year's honours list 1998".

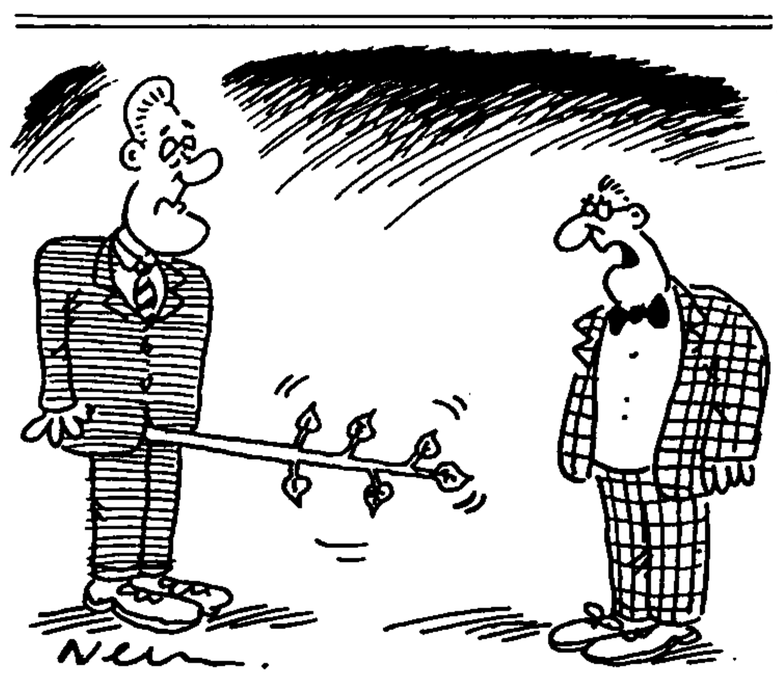
The one-sentence reply, from foreign office minister Tony Lloyd, was a splendid example of Labour's commitment to open government: "We do not comment on honours issues."

"PURELY speculative" was how Andrew James, Camelot's head of public affairs, described newspaper reports that the national lottery was planning a special £250m jackpot for the end of 1999. "No final decision has been taken about a special game for the millennium," he said.

What would Camelot have to do to offer such a colossal draw without running any risk to its own profits? In the next financial year Camelot is limited to paying out 49.9 per cent of lottery income in prize money — anything above that figure, such as a £250m jackpot, would have to come from other sources.

Two steps could be taken to fund a £250m jackpot without denting profits: 1) Eliminate all other prize payouts on such a draw — ie no £10 prizes in the game; and 2) get Oflot's permission to "rollover" the current financial year's £80m retained prize money which otherwise would go to the "good causes" at the end of March. In other words, screw the punters and screw the "good causes".

- ***Hackwatching: a year to forget*** *11*
- ***Privatised rail lands in the dock*** *12*
- ***Drugs: Biotech gets the blues*** *14*
- ***It doesn't add up — Slicker on Robinson*** *29*



"You've been lying again, Mr President"

Street Of Shame

HACK-TRICK

ENGLAND fast bowler Darren Gough wasn't the only one celebrating a hat-trick last week. It was the third time *Guardian* political hack Seumas Milne, one of the co-authors of the paper's splash on Mandelson's loan which led to the trade secretary's resignation, had splattered the stumps of his long-standing rival Paul Routledge of the *Mirror*.

Seumas and Routy go back a long way. They were once pals and admirers of Arthur Scargill (*Who he? Ed.*) But Routy lost the faith after the disastrous miners' strike of the 1980s and the controversy over Scargill's handling of NUM funds, and he wrote a critical biography of the miners' leader in the early 1990s.

Milne, whom Routy regards as a slavish Scargill toadie, got wind of the contents of the forthcoming book over several drinks with a BBC correspondent who had been lent an advance copy, and asked to borrow it. Somehow photocopies of three chapters found their way to Scargill's lawyers. Scargill was therefore able to rubbish the book before publication. A furious Routledge demanded a meeting with Milne in the aptly-named Punch Tavern in Fleet Street, which ended acrimoniously with Routy bellowing "Thief! Cheat! Liar!" at Milne's retreating figure. *Owzat!*

Milne next got sight of Routy's stumps last year, before publication of the Routledge biography of Gordon Brown which stirred up a hornets' nest with its revelation of Brown's unstilled leadership ambitions and his bitterness over the way he had been shafted by Blair and Mandelson after John Smith's death. Copies were erroneously put on sale at Glasgow airport before the official publication date — and one was bought by "Gorgeous" George Galloway MP. Leafing through the book he found an unflattering reference to himself — which spurred him to alert Milne at the *Grauniad*. Another Routy scoop bit the dust. *Owzat!*

And so to the Mandy loan story. Milne and the *Guardian* rightly insist that the proofs of Routledge's book were not the source for their scoop, which had been under investigation for months. However, it is also true that a copy of Routy's Mandelson book mysteriously went astray for several hours — possibly by having been sent in error to Routy's old desk at the *Independent on Sunday*. During that time the packet was opened and the contents eventually revealed by persons unknown to the *Grauniad*. By now Milne was running off the pitch waving a stump in the air.

Routledge remains philosophical about the damage to his batting average, despite the suspect action of his opponent — after all, "Shameless" is only doing his job. Less sanguine, however, is Routy's editor, Piers Moron, who has launched a campaign against *Grauniad* editor Alan Rusbridger, accusing him of condoning the "theft" of Routy's manuscript. Moron, of course, knows all about handling stolen property. It was the *Mirror* which encouraged "bounder" James Hewitt's girlfriend to steal love letters from the late Saint Di from his safe, and then "fenced" them to the Diana estate — which still refuses to return Hewitt's stolen property.

"Humans always break down after Christmas"

GPs are forced to ration drugs every day and Viagra should not be singled out for special consideration, according to GP Dr Rachel Pryke.

Pulse

THE PETER PRINCIPLE

THERE are two things everyone knows about Peter Mandelson: he has lots of influential friends, and he is a master of media manipulation. But where were his manipulative skills in his moment of crisis? And where were his media chums when he needed them?

On Wednesday 23 December, while Mandelson was still desperately trying to save his job, Paul Johnson chipped in helpfully in the *Daily Mail*: "Why I Now Believe My Friend Mandelson Must Resign".

Another Notting Hill neighbour, the right-wing glamourpuss Carla Powell, was equally supportive. Writing about "My Friend Peter the Puritan" in the *Sunday Telegraph*, she noted that "he is a `groupie for greatness', adoring the opportunity to talk to Henry Kissinger or Lee Kwan Yew..." One assumes it was meant as a compliment.

La Powell, no mean political groupie herself, added that Mandelson has the same qualities which "attracted me to Margaret Thatcher and Jimmy Goldsmith". Just the sort of tribute an ambitious Labour politician needs, eh?

"My Friend Peter and the Skinheads" was the headline on Robert Harris's column in the *Sunday Times*, the skinheads in question being the hacks of Fleet Street. "For the first time in 20 years," Harris revealed, "I am rather horrified by my own profession." This from a man who wrote a book about the lies and distortions of British tabloids during the Falklands War, and another book about the *Sunday Times*'s willingness to publish the bogus Hitler diaries. But all these are minor offences, apparently, beside the appalling impudence of journalists who investigate a huge, undeclared loan from one government minister to another. Oddly, Harris himself then turned skinhead, admitting that Mandelson "has been a bloody fool".

Still, Mandy could surely count on the tabloids which have been singing his praises in recent months. Here's what the *Mirror* wrote on 27 July last year: "Congratulations, Peter Mandelson. In today's Cabinet reshuffle you are set to be rewarded with a promotion into the heart of the government. It is difficult to think of someone who is more deserving." Compare and contrast with the *Mirror* editorial on Christmas Eve, after Mandelson's resignation: "He lived on the edge, privately and politically, was utterly ruthless yet astonishingly thin-skinned about criticism. In many ways, he was an accident waiting to happen. This episode has damaged Labour and inevitably the Prime Minister who has staked so much faith in his friend and political guru." But not the newspapers which staked so much faith in him, of course.

Mandelson might have hoped for more sympathy from the *Express*, which is edited by his friend and neighbour Rosie Boycott. No such luck: Rosie's rag described him as "extremely stupid" and "contemptible".

What of the *Sun*? "One man must do well in next week's Cabinet reshuffle," it declared last July. "Mandelson is not liked by many in his party. They think he's too full of himself. That's nonsense... Peter Mandelson's ideally qualified to be in the Cabinet." By 23 December, however, there had been a slight adjustment in the *Sun*'s editorial policy: "To him, being MP for hard-up Hartlepool means living like a millionaire: a £475,000 house, swanky furniture, expensive suits, glitzy parties, famous friends. That's how detached he has become from reality... He showed no judgment at all." Too full of himself, in other words.

THE TWELVE DAYS OF NO NEWS AFTER CHRISTMAS

12 "months to go" millennium bug
11 days of speculation about Charlie Whelan's future
10 "best pop videos in history"
9 as a problematic roman numeral
8 new year honours in Northern Ireland
7 gale force winds providing good photos
6 nominees for "Man of the Millennium"
5 "all-time favourite children's programmes"
4 "Wilson Revelations" from the 30-year rule
3 papers fighting over a Paul Routledge exclusive
2 days of school missed by the Blair children
1 single currency launch

SUITS YOU, SIR

CAN the Street of Shame agree about *anything* to do with Peter Mandelson? Take those expensive suits. Where are they from?

"Savile Row, where his tailor is Richard James (£1,200 plus VAT for a hand-made suit)." — Sandra Barwick and Sandra Laville, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 December.

"Sharp dark suits with crisp white shirts and carefully chosen ties are his trademark. On social occasions he is often spotted wearing a dark brushed cotton moleskin suit. He favours Paul Smith designs." — James Landale, the *Times*, 23 December.

"Contrary to one of the many urban myths, he doesn't have his shoes hand-made, but he does buy the odd £500 suit at the discreet City tailors Couch and Hoskins." — Donald Macintyre, *Independent*, 23 December.

"How did his budget stretch to Ozwald Boateng suits at £1,800 a throw?" — Steve Boggan and Paul Waugh, *Independent*, 23 December.

"He dresses in Armani." — Rachel Sylvester, *Independent on Sunday*, 27 December.

RIGHT CHARLIES

"WHO are the real winners and losers of the past fortnight's upheavals?" asked the *Guardian*, sitting back on the laurels of a story it assures everyone it did not steal from the *Mirror*'s political commentator (who had already sold it to the *Sunday Times*).

Definite losers are the political hacks who demonstrated yet again that they don't know what they're talking about.

"*Gordon Brown will stand by Whelan*," trumpeted the *Independent on Sunday* on 3 January. Andrew Grice was equally certain in the *Independent* the next day: "Downing Street... would not order Gordon Brown to dismiss Charlie Whelan."

Still, chancellors and political editors can change their minds, can't they? "Gordon Brown sacrificed his controversial press secretary yesterday as Tony Blair sought to stabilise his government," ran Grice's front page the following morning.

There were similarly red faces at the *Telegraph*, who thought it was all over the day before. "*Whelan's position looks safe after Beckett tribute*" was its story, safely tucked away on page two. But it was back to the front page the next day as "*Whelan quits as Mandelson row rages on*".

The lobby system, eh? Best way to find out what's really going on in Westminster. Last word would have to go to the *Daily Mail*, who had its own reshuffle exclusive on the fourth. "John Prescott... is now favourite to oversee the millennium dome."

FORMER paymaster-general Geoffrey Robinson must be feeling rather hard up after lending Peter Mandelson £373,000 to buy his lovely Notting Hill home and shelling out £200,000 to fund a Gordon Brown think tank before the 1997 election.

That can be the only explanation why the left-wing *New Statesman*, owned by Robinson and edited by Peter Wilby, a strong supporter of the minimum wage, is advertising for young wannabe political hacks to come on "work experience" placements. The experience, alas, includes no payment.

THE astonishing tale of journalist Greg Palast and the ludicrous front page smear on him by the *Daily Mirror* has taken a new turn. The *Mirror* "story" — that Palast behaved like a "sex pest" during the Labour party conference towards national executive candidate Margaret Payne — is now in ruins.

The *Mirror*'s central allegation (that Palast had "conned" and "bluffed" his way past the receptionist at the Colonial Hotel, Blackpool, where Mrs Payne was staying) has now been exposed as utter rubbish by Christopher King, the hotel's deputy manager, who explained in detail the misunderstanding which led the receptionist to send Palast up to Payne's room. Moreover, Mrs Payne herself now agrees that Palast had indeed arranged to interview her and had gone to her hotel for that purpose.

The entire "sex pest" smear was made up. But by whom? The only credible answer is "new" Labour's lie machine. Palast had infuriated ministers with his revelations in the *Observer* several weeks earlier that "new" Labour advisers were offering access for cash far more liberally than the Tories had ever done.

The entirely innocent fact that Palast had been in Payne's hotel room was doctored by the spinners into a *Mirror* front page howler of epic proportions. The *Evening Standard*, which ran a much milder and less prominent version than the Mirror, has already apologised and agreed to pay Palast substantial damages. Palast, an American investigative journalist, has no wish to be the plaintiff in a libel action against the *Mirror*. But he does want to see the *Mirror* lies exposed. So he approached the press complaints commission (PCC), which prides itself on assessing the truth of press stories without the unnecessary expense and flummery of a court action.

Astonishingly the commission has refused to examine Palast's complaint. In a historic letter on 21 December, Mr Tim Toulmin of the PCC gives the reasons. "The commission's constitution does not permit it to deal with a matter in which the person affected has a remedy by way of proceedings in a court of law in the United Kingdom unless it is appropriate, in particular circumstances, to do so.

"Mr Palast's complaint is one of defamation for which there is an alternative remedy available involving discovery of documents, subpoenas for witnesses and evidence taken under oath. Given the nature and scope of the allegations in this case it would clearly be more appropriate for the matter to be dealt with in court proceedings."

Could it be that the PCC and its debonair chairman Lord Wakeham will fearlessly tackle press smears and deceptions in every case which does not involve powerful papers backed by the government's spin department?

O·B·N

So cool, so stylish, and so like his mother. Confident, handsome and assured — there was a poise to Prince William that few had seen before yesterday, when the dashing youngster was the centre of attention at Sandringham. It was only his second Christmas since the death of Princess Diana but the teenager captivated the large crowd waiting to greet the Royals.

ROBERT JOBSON
Express

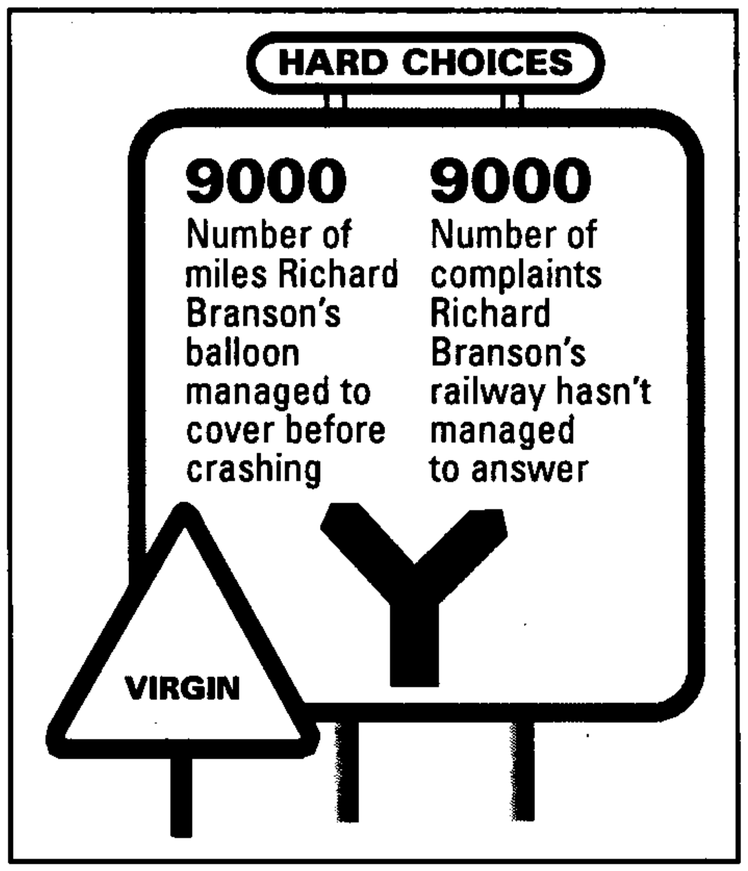
A GLIMMER of hope enthused the offices of Mirror Group newspapers (*Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror* and *Sunday People*) as the front page of *Sunday Business* on 3 January was passed excitedly from hand to hand.

The article listed five City "venture capital" groups who want to buy Mirror Group and turn it back into a private company. Such a move would be welcomed by shareholders who were shocked at the catastrophic slump in the share price last year from 249p to 148p. The *Sunday Business* article alone shoved the share price up by 10p in one day.

A key question not answered by the article is the future of Mirror chief executive David "Rommel" Montgomery. Even venture capital groups can see that the dreadful record of the group in recent years, the slump in the circulation of all three papers and the universally derided L!ve TV, must have something to do with the chief executive.

Ominously for Rommel *Sunday Business* reports that the relationship between him and new chairman Victor Blank has "cooled". Could it be that the new chairman is working for a takeover if only to rid himself of his sour and haughty chief executive?

Blank is on a high. He has been knighted in the new year's honours list. No one knows more about the City. If the threatened Monty wants to bone up on the basic principles involved in a private takeover, he should get hold of the standard work on the subject: *Take Overs and Mergers* by Weinberg and [Sir Victor] Blank.


HARD CHOICES
9000
Number of miles Richard Branson's balloon managed to cover before crashing
9000
Number of complaints Richard Branson's railway hasn't managed to answer
VIRGIN

THE *Times*, like its News International stablemates, is known for brown-nosing its boss at every opportunity. Recently, however, it has extended the opportunity to anyone else who wants a go.

In a pre-Christmas piece advising on the best ways to deal with the festive social whirl, Eva Lewis, social editor of *Tatler*, paid tribute to her own role model on the cocktail party circuit. "A charming gladiator on these occasions, he manages to work the room with the speed of a comet. Short conversations with many people, especially the hostess, he feels will make sufficient impact. I have learnt much from him."

And the identity of this social meteor? Why... Nicholas Coleridge, managing director of Condé Nast, publisher of *Tatler*.

HOW SCOOPS HAPPEN

THE Khmer Rouge is really very sorry for 1.7 million or more Cambodians dying during its 1975-79 reign. Why, the old spinmeister himself Khieu Samphan said so at a manic press conference at the Royal Phnom Penh Hotel on 29 December.

Not that Pol Pot's former head of state — who had just defected to the government along with the shadowy Nuon Chea — suffered a spontaneous outpouring of remorse. Instead Samphan just seemed to momentarily lose the plot — long enough to spark headlines around the world.

Samphan — his hair, like Chea's, dyed from snowy-white to dark brown for the cameras — had spent the previous hour dodging the same questions "why did you do what you did?" and "shouldn't you have to pay?" put a hundred different ways. His answers were hardly gripping stuff. Then Ginny Stein, of Australia's ABC TV, shouted above the pack in frustration: "Can't you even say you're sorry?"

Samphan paused, frowned and motioned the question to be put again. "I mean, aren't you even prepared to say sorry for all the people who died?" Stein said. Samphan looked down and muttered: "Yes. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Very sorry," in the same tone he might order noodle soup. For a moment the conference hushed as assembled hacks imagined their bylines below 60pt headlines: this was the first time anybody had apologized for Khmer Rouge crimes. Ever.

"What exactly are you sorry for?" yelled *New York Times* journalist Seth Mydans. "And can I asked Mr Nuon Chea if he's sorry too?" Chea, the unblinking old mass-murderer, began talking rather oddly about also being really very sorry for not only all the people but for Cambodia's animals that had died during the "war" too.

Meanwhile Samphan quickly recovered as the consummate politician, saying much about nothing, but it was too late: tomorrow's copy about murderers' remorse was already written.

YESTERDAY's Tory Norman Fowler paid a rare visit to Leeds in December when, as chairman of Regional Independent Media (RIM), he saw off a convoy of five lorries taking Christmas presents to children in Romania.

The gifts had been donated by the kind-hearted children of *Yorkshire Post* readers. But there was no such Christmas cheer for the paper's staff. On the same day RIM announced it was shedding 250 jobs at the *Yorkshire Post* and *Sheffield Star*.

Fowler's buddy Chris Oakley, chief executive of RIM, said: "The rationalisation is a regrettable but necessary step to ensure that we can move forward operating in the most efficient manner." Oddly, in the same week Oakley found time to be made an honorary fellow of the University of Central Lancashire for "services to journalism".

POLICE 5

GREATER Manchester police (GMP) chief constable David Wilmot — who got into trouble with his own force last year for saying his officers were racist — is back in the public eye trying to raise cash to make up an £18m shortfall.

He blames the deficit on a change in government funding. But surely the £10m cost of the investigation into Kevin Taylor, a friend of John Stalker, can't have helped the bank balance, can it?

The cash shortage is so serious Wilmot wants to close 10 police stations and replace some of them with hole-in-the-wall video systems. Still, he isn't pulling the purse strings too tight: after buying a helicopter for the force, "Biggles" Wilmot now wants to a fixed-wing aeroplane costing £2m as well.

To make up the shortfall Wilmot tried to raise the fee GMP charges for policing the Metrolink tram system from £250,000 to £1m. His latest bright idea targets the business community. He is asking firms to pay extra to help contribute to the city's safety on top of the amount they already pay in rates. So far just a few firms have coughed up the £999 (ho, ho) asked for.

The Wages Of Spin

BOTH the Blair and Brown camps suffered heavy casualties over the last fortnight.

First to go was the prime minister's alter ego Peter Mandelson; next was the paymaster-general, generous Geoffrey Robinson, amid dark threats that he might spill yet more beans; and now Charlie Whelan, the chancellor's spin doctor-in-chief, has been forced to leave the battle.

Whelan, an expert street fighter and a formidable survivor of earlier jousts with Number 10, had to go because his boss Gordon Brown was required to make a big sacrifice for the loss of Mandy — a loss that verges on bereavement for the prime minister.

As a drinking companion of *Mirror* political hack and Mandelson biographer Paul Routledge, Whelan was immediately blamed for leaking details of Mandy's arrangement with Geoffrey. The foolish Whelan should have realised — after Routledge's earlier explosive biography of Gordon Brown, which resulted in the sacrifice of another Brown ally, the former chief whip Nick "Newcastle" Brown — that any friend of Routledge sooner or later gets it in the neck. The trouble is on this occasion Whelan's protestations of innocence might just be true.

Routledge, who blithely claims to have sat on the Mandelson loan/gift story for at least six months (to the consternation of his editor at the *Mirror*, Piers "Gormless" Morgan), may actually have been tipped off by one of the many hangers-on in the immediate circle around Mandy and his former motormouth assistant Derek "Mutley" Draper, the latter being privy to all his master's musings and dealings.

The emergence of the story in the *Guardian* days before Christmas, with the *Mirror* immediately tipped off by Whelan as soon as he discovered the *Grauniad* was preparing to run it, not only spiked Routledge's guns but those of much of the media during the festive period. If the *Grauniad had* benefited in any way from a prior perusal of Routledge's book on Mandy, it was probably courtesy of Router's old chums at the *Independent* office where the book's proofs were erroneously sent instead of to the *Mirror*.

In the meantime, as "new" Labour's titans battle it out over the party's decayed corpse of a soul, gazing on is the man who has gained most from the meltdown. Recently judged by the *Sunday Times* to be Britain's "sixth most powerful man", the prime minister's press secretary Alastair Campbell has now leapfrogged to number two — or could it be number one? With Mandy down, Whelan out, the rest of the cabinet too cowardly to move a muscle and Fleet Street decamped up its own rectum, Campbell is now master of all he surveys.

TONY BLAIR may be devastated by Mandelson's departure, but how grief stricken is the rest of his happy family?

Almost without exception Mandelson's ex-colleagues were all delightedly raising their glasses, reflecting happily on the forced departure of the most detested figure in the Labour party.

Though chancellor Gordon Brown my now be feeling sore over the loss of Charlie Whelan, the biggest whoop of delight probably came from his office. Brown's friendship with Mandelson, prior to the deification and election of the Dear Leader, was deliberately exaggerated. But Mandelson's treachery after John Smith's death entered Brown's brooding soul. There could and would be no forgiveness.

Old Labour of course cheered loudly too and a third warring tribe, Prescott's boys, gathered round the hulking figure of Labour's deputy leader, who was grinning ear to ear. They were simply unable to believe their luck. The prickly Prescott's hatred of Mandy is as deep as the Humber. He never forgave Mandy for his attempts in the late 80s to edge him aside in favour of the "pretty people" such as the hapless but telegenic (and useless) Harriet Harman.

Increasingly isolated and incapable of employing the same tactics as the arch media manipulator, Prescott was beginning to look like yesterday's man. Now all that has changed. Lieutenants in his department and the PLP are as delighted as their boss.

The diminished Robin Cook also has a new spring in his step. Fiercely distrusted by Mandy — a view ironically shared by Gordon Brown — Cook has been a victim of his own misfortune and the Mandy-inspired briefings which have gone with them. Seemingly powerless to prevent or stall Mandelson's political "project", Cook cut an increasingly forlorn figure. Now, all that has changed too.

Former hard leftwinger Margaret Beckett will have been just as cheered. A frequent Mandy target, Beckett found herself out-manoeuvred by Mandy while presiding over the DTI. Mandy's whispering campaign that Margaret was just "too union friendly" was enough for her to lose her job and to see it filled by, er, Mandy.

Clare Short and Michael Meacher had special reasons for festive cheer too. Mandy has plotted against these two representatives of all that he hates about the Labour party for the best part of a decade. Days before the general election Mandy was whispering to the *Sun* that both Short and Meacher were "dead-meat" and would be out of government in the first reshuffle.

Sadly for Mandy both have survived his brief tenure as a minister. As has Chris Smith, whose time at the department of culture has been made an absolute misery by Mandy. And not to forget Nick Brown. As chief whip and confidant of Gordon Brown, the Newcastle East MP was in prime position to view Mandy going about his unpleasant business. But as a result of Mandy's divine intervention, Brown was unable to hold on to his cherished whip's job for long. He was shunted off to agriculture before being "outed" as gay, while a special rule had been created by Mandy's old chum John Birt at the BBC, preventing anyone in the corporation from mentioning that Mandy was also gay.

Cheeky chappie Tony Banks will have raised the odd glass or two, having involuntarily acted as Mandy's fall guy at a Labour conference a couple of years back. Mandy, to the consternation of the unions, had been in the process of punching holes in Labour's policy on the minimum wage, so when hacks failed to pick up Banks' William Hague "foetus" jibe at a Tribune rally, Mandy reminded them, dropping Banksie full square in it.

Old Labour veterans Jack Cunningham and Ann Taylor — "sensible" Labour as they describe themselves — are ecstatic. Mandy's poisonous press briefings had so destabilised the government that the Dear Leader had finally been persuaded to shift Mandy out of his "enforcer" role and give the post to the experienced Geordie fixer Cunningham instead. But Cunningham, increasingly exasperated at his inability to control either the Blair or Brown camps, said in a recent interview that his job was next to impossible.

The lacklustre Taylor was an earlier casualty of the Dear Leader's frustration at her inability to dump Old Labour education baggage, but Mandy was not exactly a fan of hers either. And then there are Mandy's earlier victims such as David Clark, who barely got his feet under his ministerial desk before the mysterious press briefings got started. While Clark's then number two — Mandy — was all public sweetness and light about his boss, the hacks knew differently. Clark's early departure at Mandy's behest was accompanied by any hope of the promised freedom of information bill.

While the union barons rubbed their hands with glee, the bulk of the parliamentary Labour party was also in cahoots. With Mandy gone, several members became emboldened and even gave vent to the odd off-message, on record, comment. As the days passed it rapidly became apparent that the Mandy terror had lifted, revealing only one lonely friend of the disgraced minister... the visibly bereaved Dear Leader.

ONE group deeply discomforted by Peter Mandelson's departure includes all the hacks from the Commons press gallery and the political departments of the major broadcast companies whose fortunes had risen while lapping up his briefings.

But now "Mandy's Urinals" are robbed of a protector and benefactor. Who will miss him the most?

Top of the list is the *Independent*'s political commentator Donald MacIntyre, whose toadying support earned him the privilege of writing a hagiography of Mandelson. The book, originally due to be published in the new year, will presumably have to be completely rewritten.

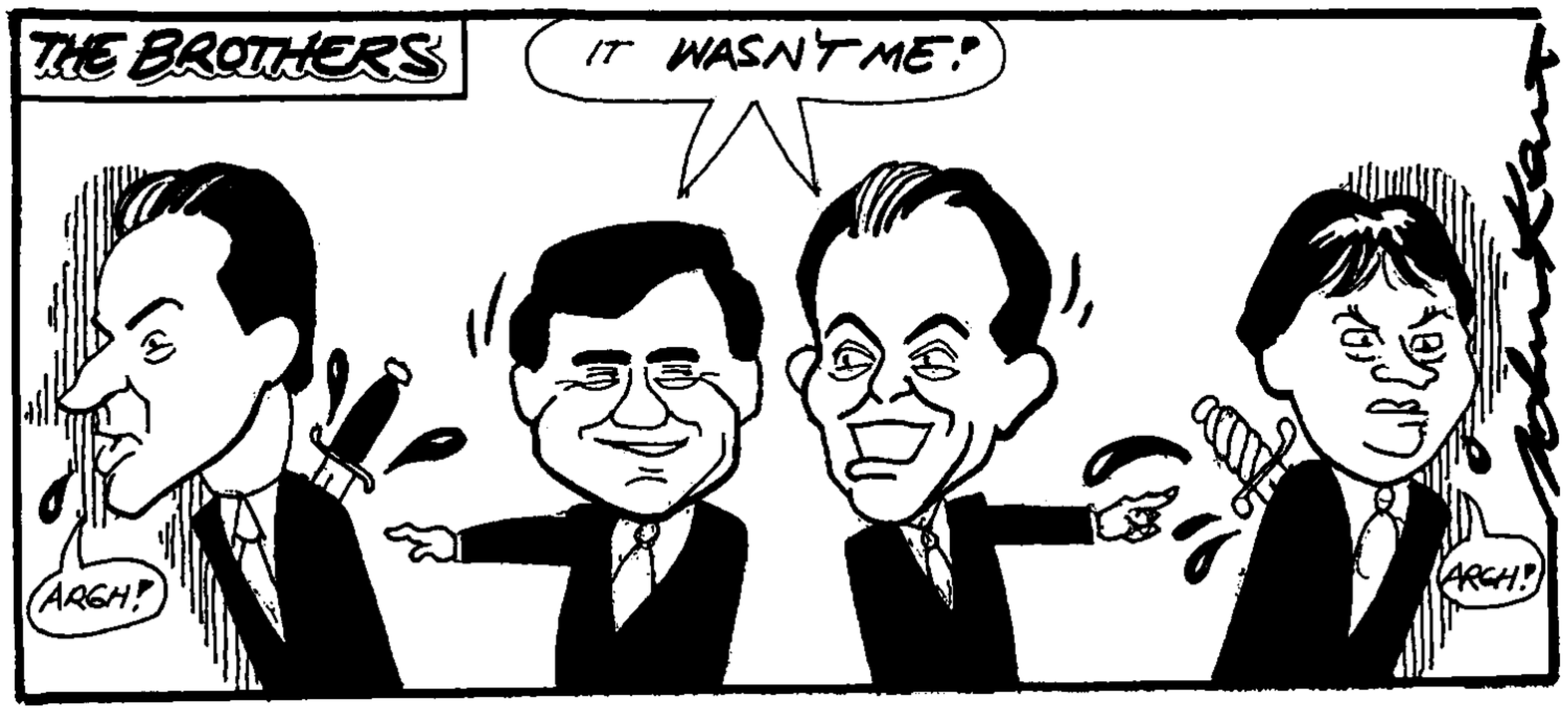
The once former scourge of "off the record lobby briefings" — the *Express*'s Tony Bevins — will take Mandelson's fall hard, as will longtime aficionado Patrick Wintour of the *Observer* and former *Sunday Times* journalist Andrew Grice, now with the *Indie*. Grice's royal performance marching several steps behind the Prince of Darkness as the latter led him across the lobby for his weekly briefing entertained many an "old" Labour MP.

WHILE there was much rejoicing among Labour backbenchers and grassroots party members at Mandy's fall, there were long faces at the CBI, which rushed out a statement mourning the loss of his "clear sense of the key requirements for business success" from the cabinet.

The "key requirement" uppermost in CBI minds was Mandelson's effort to water down the "Fairness at Work" legislation promised in Labour's manifesto. Just five days before his resignation Mandy had come up with two brilliant wheezes to emasculate the white paper.

First, he changed the proposal that workers couldn't be sacked during strikes to read that they couldn't be sacked in *the first eight weeks* of a dispute. So "tough" bosses who let disputes drag on would have their revenge. Second, he introduced a loophole into the stipulation that employers must recognise trade unions where more than 50 percent of staff were members. Bosses could be exempted, he said, if they could show that recognition "would undermine good industrial relations" — eg by going on strike, working to rule or, er, annoying their employer in any way. These let-out clauses were great news for anti-union employers such as Rupert Murdoch's News International and Walkers Crisps.

David Blunkett announced a new free-books-for-schools scheme just two days before Mandelson's retreat on union recognition. The education secretary was full of praise for the altruistic private firms who had stepped forward to help fund state schools. By an amazing coincidence, the scheme's sponsors just happen to be... News International and Walkers Crisps!



NOOKS and CORNERS

***ROBINSONS, we've got 'em*, could become the motto of "new" Labour. Geoffrey may be in disgrace, but Granada boss Gerry seems to go from strength to strength.**

As predicted in *Eye* 959, Granada has been awarded the £60m contract for catering at the millennium dome. The announcement was sneaked out over Christmas in the hope of avoiding more publicity about high-flying businessmen called Robinson with close links to Labour. While Mandelson's dome supremo role has been taken over by Tony's crony Lord Falconer, ministerial responsibility rests with culture secretary Chris Smith. The man who made, er, Gerry Robinson head of the Arts Council. All very agreeable.

The New Millennium Experience Company has, however, stopped short of giving Granada the entire contract, as originally intended. That could have been seen as *too* cosy. The cake will be split between Gerry's lot and Letherby and Christopher, a subsidiary of catering giant Compass.

Nevertheless the dome job is but the latest in a string of Granada successes in official catering contracts: South Bucks NHS trust (under Geoffrey Robinson's private finance initiative); the British Library; and a 49 percent stake in the Post Office's catering arm, Quadrant, with a £770m turnover. In fact Granada makes far more money from hotels and catering (£589m last year) than it does from TV (£255m). Gerry proves it can still be a grand life for a Labour chum called Robinson!

ONE of the first invitations to MPs to have a drink in 1999 on the rich and powerful went out from the big brewer Bass on 14 December.

Chairman Sir Ian Prosser invited scores of MPs with breweries or other Bass interests in their constituencies to "attend Bass's annual parliamentary reception" on 24 February at 1 Great George St, at 12.45 for 1pm. "As you will be aware," writes Sir Ian, "Bass has undergone some changes in the past twelve months... We would welcome the opportunity to update you on these developments over lunch."

Before they flock to the trough Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs must reflect carefully about matters which should not really be raised in the discussion. These include:

1 The government's stern opposition to grotesque rewards for industrial fat cats whose firms are not doing especially well.

2 The announcement by Bass just before Christmas that Sir Ian Prosser has been given a present of 107,000 extra shares worth £717,000.

3 The profits warning issued by Bass last November, including the news that trading in the summer had been "diabolical" which forced analysts to slash the group's profit forecasts by 8 percent.

ALUN MICHAEL, Tony Blair's curate in Wales who hopes to become leader of the Welsh assembly, has chickened out of fighting a first-past-the-post seat in next May's election.

Touchingly he says he doesn't want to stand in the way of enthusiastic "new" Labourites. So he's bravely opted to go on the top-up list of candidates from which 20 of the 60 assembly members will be returned by proportional representation, with electors voting for a party not a named candidate.

Michael expects to head the list in mid-Wales. Oddly enough he happens to be a member of the panel which decides the pecking order. Unsurprisingly, the eight-strong body is distinctly Blairite: members include David Gardner, the party's deputy general secretary; Terry Thomas, former radical NUM official now a fervent convert to "the project"; and two "safe" members of the national executive committee.

Michael's rival, the Cardiff West MP Rhodri Morgan, is fighting a first-past-the-post seat.

JOHN PRESCOTT's appointment of a new managing director of London Underground pointedly drew from the public sector, allaying staff fears about the semi-privatisation of the tube.

But the record of Derek Smith is nothing to boast about. He was an NHS manager for 20 years but was also precisely the kind of fat cat Labour complained about so much when in opposition.

In 1996 the King's Hospital boss was revealed to be the second highest paid trust chief executive in the country, earning £97,000 a year. After the next pay round campaigners revealed that Smith had burst through the £100,000 bracket. Now he can look forward to a salary as large as his predecessor, Dennis Tunnicliffe, who raked in £150,000 a year.

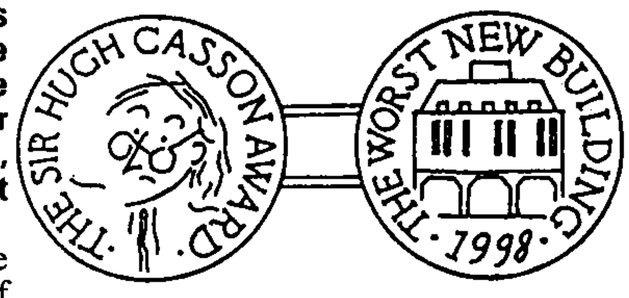
THE *Mail on Sunday*'s predictions of a thousand lost jobs at BP was vigorously denied by the company in an angry rebuttal. Who is right? This is really a matter for the department for trade and industry and the minister of state there, Lord Simon of Highbury — former chairman of BP.

'Backbiter'

Correction

IN EYE 965 we wrote that Tony Edwards had been chief executive of Dowty Group, now a TI Group subsidiary, at the time of a contract for making wing seals for US fighters which was later disputed, leading TI to pay the US government $12.35m in settlement. In fact the wing seal deal took place long before TI acquired Dowty and before Mr Edwards joined the company. Sorry.

ND some have greatness thrust upon them... The time has come to choose the winner of the Sir Hugh Casson Award for 1998 and, as always, the choice is difficult as the field is so wide.



Some years of course the winner simply has to be one of those celebrated knighted architects whose eminence is beyond question or dispute (or you may be hearing from My Lord Rogers' lawyers); for what more suitable or predictable winner could there have been for this year's Stirling Prize than the Duxford American Airforce Museum hanger by the firm of Sir Norman Foster? He has been designing aeroplane hangars for all possible purposes for most of his distinguished career, after all (remember the Sainsbury Centre?)

But outsiders must have a chance, occasionally, and buildings by obscure architects sometimes thrust themselves on our attention simply by dint of their prominence or sheer bulk. Such is the case with this year's clear winner: the Buchanan Galleries in Glasgow, a huge shopping centre in the city centre — surely the biggest new building in Scotland — which is now almost complete and which will open in a few months' time to be part of and to add lustre to Glasgow's stint as the UK City of Architecture and Design, 1999.

Now the organisation set up to run this cultural year for Glasgow is doing its best to promote decent new architecture, but you really cannot expect the city fathers — that gang of local Labour politicians who have run the city for years — to understand what the year of architecture is all about.

Architecture is a nuisance: historic buildings are usually in the way of something new and are best left to rot or to "go on fire" — except, these days, when they are by Charles Rennie Mackintosh as the tourist department insists there is money in Toshie's ridiculous designs. As for new architecture, it is certainly not worth worrying about or spending money on: does anyone visit Glasgow to see good modern architecture? Of course not: there isn't any.

Take the Buchanan Galleries. Here was a vast development site, at the top of Glasgow's smartest shopping street, and next to the Royal Concert Hall opened in 1990. People visit Glasgow to shop — what else? — and John Lewis wanted to open a store there: so a wonderful opportunity. And whenever there is a development opportunity, Glasgow says yes please — And it wouldn't do to criticise the design. I mean, what are planning departments and planning officers for, if not to do as they are told by councillors? And the blinkered councillors, nurtured by decades of self-hating nihilism, can only see the value of mediocrity: quality is suspect. As for all the hype about the City of Culture and the City of Architecture and Design, well, it is just hype, after all: nothing to do with real life.

So when the developers, Slough Estates and Henderson Investors, came up with a huge scheme with 75 shop units, overwhelming the scale of Buchanan Street and straddling two city blocks — crossing Bath Street to create a stinking dank underpass — all designed in a dated, mechanical sort of Classical Post-Modern, complete with silly stubby little towers, nobody dared say a word in criticism to try to make it better let alone suggest that they employ a decent (local?) architect. Never mind that the side and back of this monster consists of blank walls of hideous orange brick that blight the surrounding area; never mind that the development proudly announces 2,000 parking spaces when civilized cities are trying to control the car — Glasgow is still in the car-worshipping 1950s, after all.

The bit containing John Lewis's was designed by Legge Ericsson, of Dalkeith, and has a sort of sub-sub-Toshie facade with fatuous oriels in Renfrew Street, with a sort of tacked-on broken pediment which, perhaps (or perhaps not), is a response to the curious divided portico of Sir Leslie Martin's Concert Hall next door. But the main part of the development is the work of Messrs Jenkins & Marr, of Aberdeen, and it is instructive to examine the way they have dealt with the main entrance of the Concert Hall facing down Buchanan Street, as it abuts their own building.

Now this is a sort of portico, concave in shape, so, while an additional entrance to the shops has been tacked on to its west, on the other side the architects have simply repeated the portico design, continuing the curve and so diminishing the Concert Hall in importance — except that the whole thing is so crass and inept it is not quite the same height and has a straight bit in the middle.

The great Pugin said there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction or propriety, and by propriety he meant that scale of values by which a civic building like a concert hall is more important than a department store. But in Glasgow, it would seem, shopping matters more than culture. So the Buchanan Galleries are a triumph — a triumph of barbarism, vulgarity, ineptitude, that also succeed (amazingly) in making Leslie Martin's starved and mean Concert Hall look half decent by comparison. A worthy recipient of the Casson Award for 1998. Roll on 1999.

'Piloti'

"I've turned forty"

New Year Resolutions

THE Christmas schedules are full of the past — old movies, stretched episodes of established shows, adaptations of classic novels — but, as the year turns, channels are forced to face the future. As is traditional at this time, Square Eyes offers the resolutions the channels should be making.

BBC 1. Controller Peter Salmon has to address one problem of under-supply and one of over-production. The shortage involves sport. This year will be the first in which the BBC has not had coverage of the FA cup and the last summer in which it has live cricket.

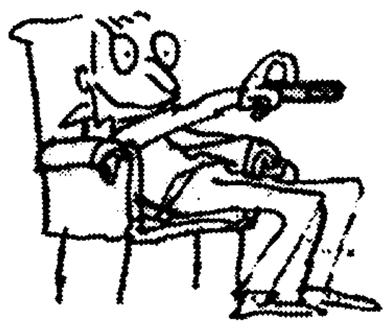
Ball-phobics may see this as a reason to cheer but sport has been vital to the channel's audience share and, more importantly, in providing a justification for the licence fee being levied from working-class men. Salmon is embarking on an enforced experiment, becoming the first controller to attempt to run a mainstream channel without big sporting contracts. If he chooses to court blue-collar male viewers through drama, sitcom or documentary, all BBC1 viewers will suffer.

Salmon's dilemma of excess involves so-called "docu-soaps". Fly-on-the-wall coverage of builders, prisoners and numerous other professions is about to enter his schedules. The BBC overcommissioned period dramas after success in that field and Salmon needs to take a stand against programme-cloning. Another worrying symptom in that area is the glut of hospital dramas due: *Holby City*, an actual spin-off from *Casualty*, and *Life Support*, an imitation in spirit, are both due soon on BBC1.

BBC2. New controller Jane Root's biggest problem is the challenge facing future managers of Manchester United: living up to the achievements of the past. She must address two questions considered but fudged by her predecessors: should *Newsnight* be shifted from 10.30pm; and can the case continue to be made for prestige dramas and documentaries (*Holding On*, *The Cold War*) which earn enthusiastic reviews but attract few viewers?

She must also decide (with Salmon) whether — now that BBC1 steals BBC2 shows which win high ratings (*Changing Rooms*, etc) — BBC2 should start taking in series from the main channel which fail to deliver the ratings Salmon wants: for example, *Question Time* and *Panorama*.

ITV. Following a year in which its highest-profile fiction hit was a documentary, ITV needs to reassure viewers and regulators that the newer franchise holders (particularly Carlton) are up to the job.



A row over factual sloppiness is also unfortunate on the brink of the biggest rearrangement of the third channel's news for decades: *News At Ten* becomes *News At Six Thirty* and will be viewed obsessively by telly watchdogs and the broadsheet critics for signs of trivialisation. The same dumbometer will be played carefully across Trevor McDonald's *60 Minutes*, a soft news magazine based on an American genre which, worryingly, has become associated with sensationalism and prurience.

Otherwise, ITV badly needs drama hits. Regrettably, a recent tendency to rely too heavily on actors proved bankable in other hits shows no sign of going. Imminent 1999 series including *Hunting Venus*, a rock comedy starring both Neil Morrisey and Martin Clunes from *Men Behaving Badly*, and yet another vehicle for Robson Green: *Rhinoceros*, a romantic family drama.

Channel 4. In a year when C4 chief executive Michael Jackson's name is bound to be distractingly raised in connection with the BBC D-G vacancy due in March 2000, Jackson needs to restore industry confidence after some strange decisions last year.

It's hard to see how Channel 4's "alternative" remit is served by poaching cricket from BBC1 or paying £400,000 for an interview with Monica Lewinsky who, limited by both a book contract and perjury laws relating to the evidence she gave Kenneth Starr, is unlikely to say very much new.

There were also simply far too many sleazily opportunistic series about sex on the channel. Those decisions would be the subject of tough questioning at any future BBC interview, but Jackson's own board may start asking questions unless the man who gave a distinctive feel to BBC2 when he was there can create an equally coherent new identity for Channel 4.

Channel 5. At least the fourth channel long ago made an unanswerable case for its existence. The fifth, entering its third year of transmission, still seems dismayingly irrelevant. So far the only signatures are a newsreader, Kirsty Young, whom everyone is always supposed to be about to poach but never quite does, and a late night talk show host, Jack Docherty, who has finally managed to kill off the great illusion of all fortysomething British TV execs: that David Letterman's show in the US can be successfully copied in this country.

Sky One. Having delivered 1998's least-wanted broadcasting innovation — a chance to see Chris Evans's Virgin breakfast show as well as listen to it — this channel still needs to demonstrate that it can show original programming as well as bought-in Americana like *Friends*. The early omens are not good.

Initial Sky One offerings for 1999 include *Greece Uncovered*, the latest in its shagging holidaymakers series, and *Beat The Crusher*, a dismaying-sounding new game show, hosted by Freddie Starr and Melinda Messenger, in which contestants who fail to meet a set of challenges will see their own beloved vehicle put through a car crusher.

'Square Eyes'

MEDIA NEWS

FOUR years ago the BBC decided it needed a massive new studio in Belfast called Blackstaff House. Then, just as the multi-million pound complex neared completion, it decided to axe most of the staff who would have worked there making programmes.

This meant the BBC had lots of brand new offices and no one to put in them. For the last three years the site has been on the market for sale or rent, but there has been no taker. Until now.

The corporation's solution is brilliant: the entire building is being expensively renovated so that the facilities group Capita can move in. Not that it will now become a "revenue earner" for the Beeb. Rather, it will remain another example of the insanity wrought by the Birtian revolution. For Capita is paid by the BBC to run its new, contracted out central complaints service.

Thus letters to Broadcasting House demanding to know why programmes are now so pisspoor will be airfreighted to Belfast where a hundred or so minions will send out bland replies from a building which was once intended to, er, produce programmes. Just what people pay the licence fee for.

THE BBC is intent on turning one of its most famous broadcasting centres into a colony of Birtist clones with little idea of how to do their jobs.

Staff at Pebble Mill in Birmingham are paying the price for management incompetence with redundancies in the production department. BBC personnel have drawn up a complicated set of redundancy criteria which involve staff scoring points in various areas of expertise. A low score means no job.

There are lots of point scoring sections for such Birtian skills as writing bids for the BBC's barmy internal market, understanding the labyrinthine financial systems, going on management courses, and being multi-skilled, etc. But there are far fewer opportunities to score points for skills like diligent daily work in making sure your radio or TV programme gets on air.

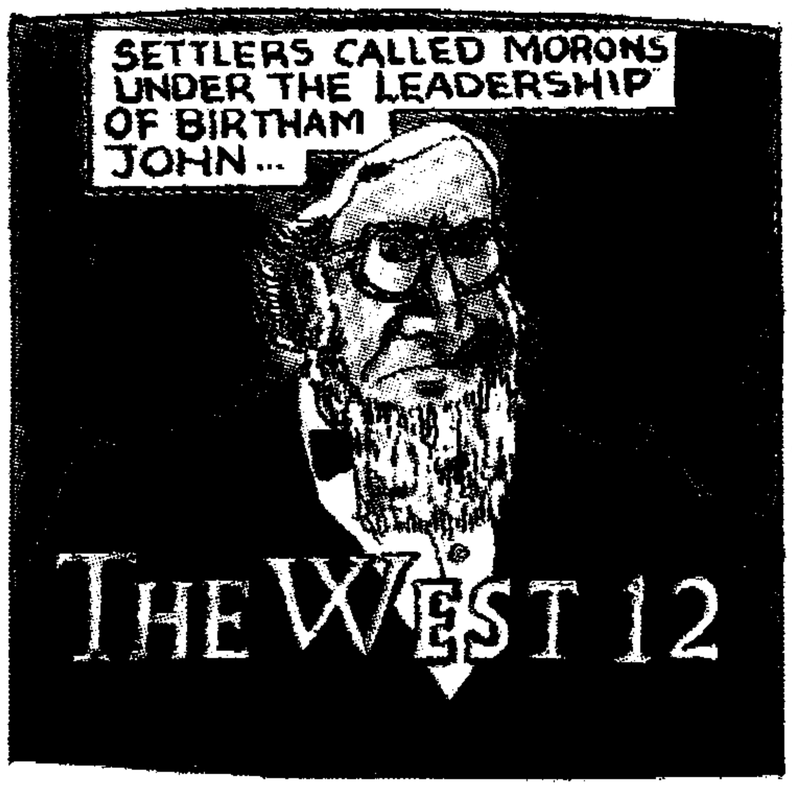
Likewise there is only one mention of specialist knowledge like farming: the people on *Farming Today* should understand BBC accounting procedures better than agriculture. Staff fear that the redundancy criteria mean that those who do a brilliant job on their programme but know little about the mechanisms of the internal market will lose out.

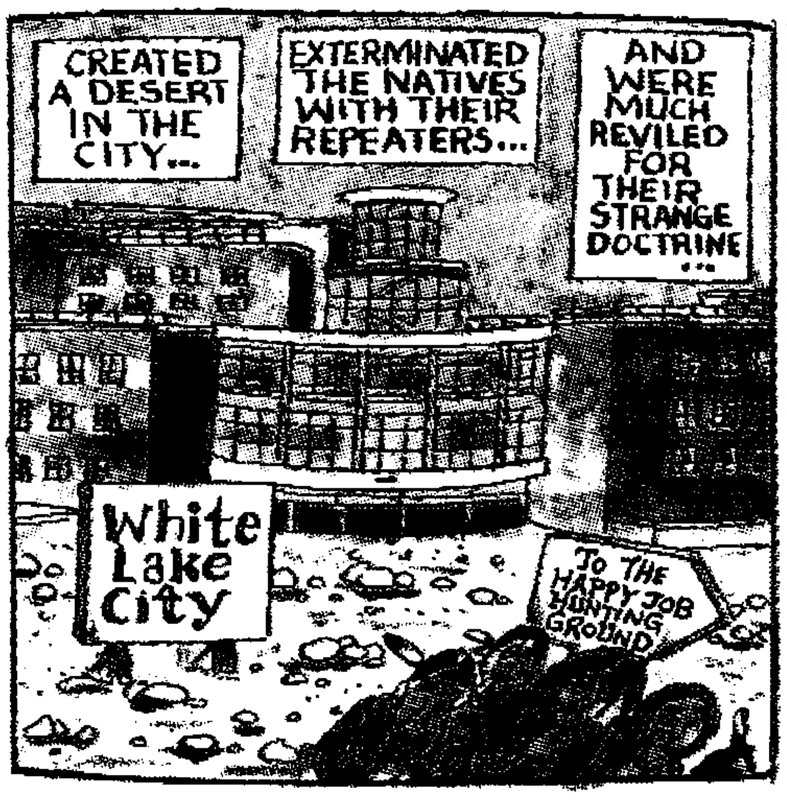
Stand by for a drop in programme quality and another nail in the coffin of Pebble Mill.

LISTENERS to Radio 4's *You and Yours* will have been enthused by the way "travel expert" Nigel Coombes extolled the attractions of Boulogne, the agreeable French town just a short hop across the channel.

Not only is Boulogne an ideal place for lunch and a spot of shopping, Coombes told listeners, it also has plenty of good picnic spots, "including the Bois de Boulogne".

Er, yes — though day-trippers there might be in danger of missing their ferry home given that the Bois de Boulogne, in western Paris, is more than 200 miles from the port with a similar name.



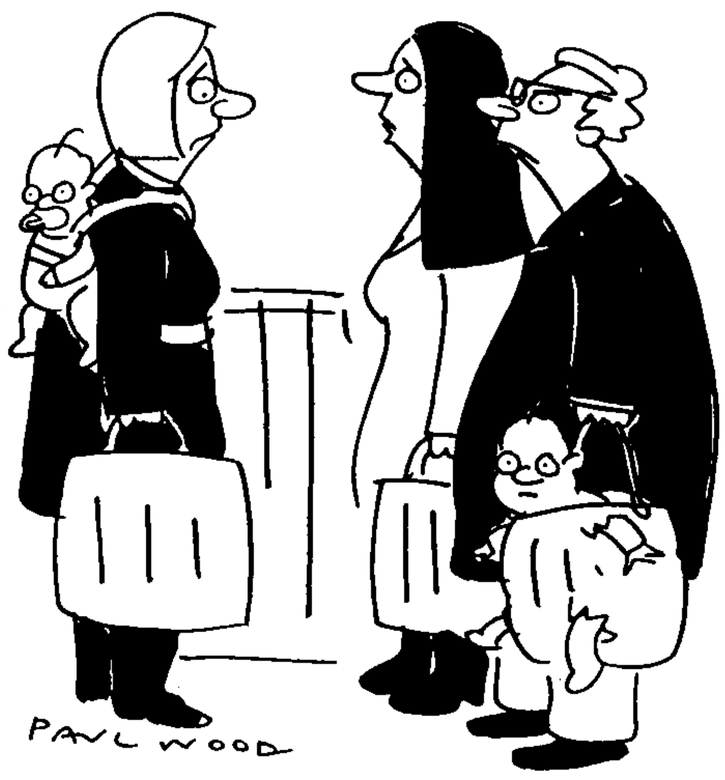

CREATED A DESERT IN THE CITY...
EXTERMINATED THE NATIVES WITH THEIR REPEATERS...
AND WERE MUCH REVILED FOR THEIR STRANGE DOCTRINE ...
White Lake City
TO THE HAPPY JOB HUNTING GROUND

Plugged In

Sky's £7.95 bargain looks Sunderful deal. Sunderland fans will soon be able to watch their team for just £7.95 — thanks to Sky. Football League chiefs met yesterday to thrash out a deal with the satellite TV company. And they chose Oxford v. Sunderland on February 27 to kick off the experiment. The game will cost viewers just £7.95 to watch and will be broadcast live.

The Sun

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.



"Tony says we can't afford a proper baby carrier"

C4 uses gay soap to clean up image

Broadcast

MUCH festive merriment was generated by the high moral tone of the Rev Ernest Rea, head of religious affairs at the BBC, who pronounced himself "absolutely appalled" by the harmless party streak of a female producer in his department trotting around in nothing but her socks at an office party.

Rea has demanded statements from everyone who attended the bash and is threatening severe disciplinary action. But can this self-righteous guardian of BBC morality by any chance be related to the Rev Ernest Rea who was enthusiastically pursuing an affair in the early 1990s with gorgeous pouting Gaynor Vaughan-Jones, head of light entertainment at BBC Manchester, thus earning himself the nickname "Ernie, the fastest milkman in the west"?

Indeed it can. But Ernie then divorced his wife and made an honest woman of Gaynor; so that's all right then.

JUST FANCY THAT

SEVERAL *Eye* readers were intrigued by the item in the last issue that Chris Adams, "one of the country's leading neurosurgeons", had charged £32,000 for giving expert evidence for an afternoon in a libel trial, and justified the amount by reference to his earnings in private practice of about £1m a year.

They ask if this could be the same Chris Adams who resigned as head of the neurosurgery unit at Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary in December 1995, complaining bitterly and publicly that clinical standards and patients' health had suffered under the new "free market" reforms in the National Health Service.

The answer is, er, yes.

HACKWATCH AWARDS FOR 1998

Most Desperate Bid For Yoof Appeal

"As one Labour source put it yesterday, 'Blair is the President and Brown the prime minister'; or, to take a showbiz metaphor, does anyone remember a pop group called Wham!? There was Andrew Ridgley and George Michael. You must remember. 'Wham! Bam! I Am a Man!' was one of their songs..." — Boris Johnson, *Daily Telegraph*.

Greatest Grauniad Corrections

"A photograph accompanying a report headed Fight Grows for Gays in Video Case, page 5, yesterday, was wrongly captioned, transposing the two people shown in it. It should have read as follows: Allan Horsfall, left, a veteran gay activist in Bolton, and Terry Connell, convicted on one charge of gross indecency. Apologies to both."

"An item headed Bad Day: Educashun, in a sidebar on the Policy and Politics page yesterday, derived mild amusement from numerous spelling mistakes in a Labour Party jobs advertisement carried in the previous day's paper. All the errors were, in fact, made by the *Guardian*. None of them was in the original copy supplied by the Labour Party."

"On the Analysis page yesterday, we referred to Germany's Italian frontier. It does not have one."

"Here is the correct version of a correction which appeared incorrectly yesterday."

Most Eerie Echo

"Whatever position you take on the President's sexual appetite — kneeling, missionary, or biblical stone-throwing — we can presumably all agree that he was telling the truth at this moment." — Thomas Sutcliffe, *Independent*, 26 January 1998.

"Whatever position you take on the President's sexual appetite — kneeling, missionary or biblical stone-throwing — it feels like old news." — Margaret Vaughn, *Glasgow Herald*, 29 January 1998.

Most Consistent Editorial Line

"That damned Dome has disaster written all over it." — *Sun* editorial, 12 January 1998.

"Sorry to bring up that damned Dome again, folks, but..." — *Sun* editorial, 15 January.

"There's no place like Dome. The closer the Millennium gets, the more it scares us..." — *Sun* editorial, 17 January.

"What a terrible monument to the human ego." — *Sun* editorial, 17 February.

"The plans for the Millennium Experience are dazzling. If it all comes off, the Prime Minister's prediction will be correct: *The Dome will be a great advert for Britain*." — *Sun* editorial, 25 February, the day after Blair announces that he has agreed a £12m sponsorship deal for the Dome with, er, Rupert Murdoch.

Most Even-handed Coverage

"Louise Woodward... is innocent. Support our campaign for Louise's release." — *Mirror*, 1 November 1997.

"LOUISE IS A LYING MONSTER." — *Mirror*, 29 May 1998.

"I turned off after five minutes. I'm sick of period drama. I just thought, 'Oh God, another one with bonnets'." — Professor Lisa Jardine on the BBC's *Vanity Fair* adaptation, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 November.

"In BBC1's new *Vanity Fair* adaptation, she [Becky Sharp] is more than just a sexy schemer, she is an in-yer-face, paid-up member of the MTV generation... Professor Lisa Jardine of Queen Mary's and Westfield College, London, says the adaptation is 'brilliant'." — *Observer*, 8 November.

"What is the point of releasing 22 hours of Monica Lewinsky tapes?... Will it make Monica a star? Hardly. These tapes are not going to make a Christmas hit. They are the ramblings and infatuations of a silly young woman." — Editorial in the *Mirror*, 18 November.

"To Hear Monica's Voice Just Dial 0660 000 789. Calls cost 50p per minute." — The *Mirror*, 18 November.

Greatest Minds Thinking Alike

"Men and some women squabble over whether he [Leonardo DiCaprio] is good looking enough to deserve all this attention. It is true that he can look, in some lights, like a young Norman Lamont..." — Sarah Sands, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 March.

"MPs are remarking on the uncanny likeness between heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio, of *Titanic*-mania fame, and — are you ready for this? — the young Norman Lamont." — Eben Black, *News of the World*, 22 March.

"Mr DiCaprio... is a dead ringer for the young Norman Lamont." — Peter McKay, *Daily Mail*, 23 March.

Most Accurate Prediction

"There is only one Labour MP apart from Mr Blair who can relax, secure in the knowledge he will not be moved. Although his Green Paper was less radical than advertised, Frank Field — like child benefit — can never be got rid of." — Michael Gove, *The Times*, 23 May.

"Harriet Harman will remain in the Cabinet." — Anthony Bevins, *Express*, 27 July.

Most Fearless Independence

"Special Offer! Get two tickets for the price of one to see *The Avengers*." — *Independent on Sunday* promotion, 16 August, page 1.

"[*The Avengers*] is overproduced, overplayed and painfully stilted. The most obvious trouble is the bad miscasting... Disappointingly, Chechik's film can only stagger more deeply into incoherence." — *Independent on Sunday* film review, 16 August.

Best Sense Of Priorities

"On a recent visit to Bosnia, I saw some harrowing sights but experienced nothing as personally disagreeable as the piped extracts from *Lakme* at the airport, and Schubert's *Rosamunde* played interminably in the aircraft awaiting take-off." — Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *Prospect*.

Most Versatile Hack

"Billed as a Republican rottweiler, a right-wing extremist and a fanatical prosecutor with a mission to destroy the Clinton presidency, Mr Starr is better characterised as a tame and placid man with the zeal of a plump sheep. Indeed, Mr Clinton should be thankful that his so-called nemesis is in reality a Washington insider who craves the approval of the mainstream press, and hates to rock the boat." — Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 January 1998.

"Mr Starr, in effect, is eliminating Mr Clinton with a single shot. But it is well aimed. The Starr Report, I hazard, will be more than enough." — Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September.

"Kenneth Starr has failed to catch his prey. I am forced to conclude that Mr Starr has lost his wits." — Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *Daily Telegraph*, 14 September.

"Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel, has plainly achieved his preliminary purpose of discrediting the word of this president... After this softening-up exercise, Mr Starr probably feels strong enough to move on to the next stage." — Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 September.

"This is not Watergate." — Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September.

"Those who say that this scandal does not rise to the level of Watergate may have to eat their words." — Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 September.

Special Nostradamus Award

"What the Welsh Assembly needs now to capture the public imagination is, of course, for Ron Davies to get caught with his trousers down." — *Western Mail*, 26 September, exactly one month before the Welsh secretary went walkabout on Clapham Common.

"Run for your lives, it's Monsanta!"

DOWN ON THE FARM

Milk Quotas

SOME of the best ruses have no obvious victim — not at first, anyway. But let us examine the Great Milk Quota Scam of 1984, still creating huge wealth today for its founders.

When the European union introduced milk quotas in 1984 each member state had an allocation to use as it wanted. In other countries the quota remained government property, loaned to farmers who, on retirement, return their quota to the pool for reissue.

Britain did no such thing. Gripped by the Thatcherite obsession with the free market, and under pressure from the National Farmers' Union for a "flexible" system, the ministry of agriculture (MAFF) gave the quota freely and in perpetuity to dairy farmers then in production.

Not that Maff actually said that that was what it was doing. But the cover-up continues to this day. In the *Guide to Milk Quotas* it is boldly written: "The quota is attached to the holding, rather than the producer. If a holding changes hands, the new occupant is, as a general rule, entitled to the quota." Er, as a general rule this is cobblers.

Well established legal devices have driven a coach and horses through the principle, as MAFF intended, so that quota is now seen as the private property of the original producers to sell or lease annually, even after they have retired. The intervention board, which administers quota, is officially unaware of this and solemnly believes that the thousands of quota transfers with land leases attached are all bona fide deals.

The effect is that every year more of the free-quota chaps retire — they can afford to, though they may grumble about the tax on their quota — leaving later entrants to dairying and those with not enough quota having to buy more quota with large amounts of their turnover.

Costs and values are high. On an average farm the milk quota is currently worth £250,000 — an annual lease value of £50,000. Obviously some farmers must be willing to pay such prices — but not those with no quota. The market is made by farmers who have covered their fixed costs and regard expansion as a matter of margins. No one without some free quota can enter dairying, and it remains a struggle for those who have to lease, such as county council tenant farmers.

Faced with this gross injustice the NFU milk committee occasionally debates the matter. But it never agrees any recommendations. It would be unkind, it says, to do away with the "non-producing quota-holders" because they provide a pool of quota for tenant farmers to lease. Lucky old tenants.

Of course milk quotas have not only enriched many established NFU members, but they provide an effective bar to entry to dairying, thus working towards the grand plan of "rationalisation". Which is why the NFU also stands for "Nice For Us".

'Gumboot'

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on... signal failures

EARLY 1999 could be a defining period for the privatised rail industry as several court cases should clarify where the buck stops on safety responsibilities.

Railtrack and two of its engineering contractors, Fastline and GTRM, are due in court over an alarming incident in June 1997 at Kenilworth, where the contractors had been working for Railtrack.

A faulty signal told the driver of an InterCity express to proceed along the mainline, but the train was led into a side track. Happily there was no train on the side track and the express was travelling much slower than the usual 90mph, but it appeared that strict safety regulations had been breached.

Railtrack's directors want their various contractors to shoulder safety duties. Their vision is of Railtrack as a giant procurement agency, a middle man between engineers and train operators. They award huge "extended arm" contracts to some companies in the hope of distancing Railtrack from as much of the nitty-gritty engineering details as possible, the idea being that if a rail breaks or a signal fails Railtrack can simply blame the "extended arm" contractor which is meant to look after such things. With such bothersome liabilities out of its remit, Railtrack's hands would be free for core activities like, er, collecting access fees from train operators and engineering bigger profits every year.

However, Railtrack's ambitions look likely to be switched on to a different track by the law courts and the health and safety executive (HSE). Vic Coleman, the HSE's chief inspector of railways, recently "challenged Railtrack to demonstrate its commitment to improving both track conditions and its control of contractors". The commons transport committee also attacked Railtrack for inadequate monitoring of contractors' work and said Railtrack was still responsible for work carried out on its behalf.

Passing the buck looked easier for Great Western Trains after the Southall crash in September 1997, when the GWT driver involved was quickly apprehended by Inspector Knacker. It looked as though the driver would take the blame for the accident regardless of other contributory factors — as after the Cowden crash in 1994 (*Eyes passim*). But then the crown prosecution service (CPS) started showing an interest in rail safety, and when the Southall driver appears in court on 12 January he will be in the dock with GWT. At last GWT's owner First Group — anything but first in so many respects — is earning its title, as GWT is the first train operator ever to be charged with corporate manslaughter in the UK.

In this litigious climate, Railtrack's primary interest is to cover its own back — as opposed to actively ensuring the railway is as safe as possible. Without waiting for the conclusions of the Kenilworth court case or a review of Fastline's safety regime, Railtrack gave a £400m four-year contract for renewing tracks in the Midlands to Fastline, by then part of the Jarvis construction group (*Eye* 946). Late last year Railtrack announced GTRM was likely to be reawarded maintenance contracts for the West Midlands and mid-Wales, and gain the contract for south Wales from another company. The RMT union says Railtrack contractors caused 14 percent more safety irregularities last year than in 1997.

Open discussion of accidents and rapid remedial action across the country, if needed, has traditionally been a strong point on the railways, but Railtrack has apparently still not impressed the "lessons learned" from the Kenilworth incident on managers and contractors in other parts of the country. Last September an InterCity 125 driver was given a signal to proceed to London from Dore, near Sheffield, but suddenly found his train turning right on to the line to Manchester. Had a train been coming from London at that time a spectacular crash could have occurred.

This was reminiscent of the incident at Kenilworth, the root of both apparently being signals incorrectly wired-up after engineering work. If this is proved to be the case, some searching questions need to be asked because that was also the root of the Clapham Junction crash — and the railways have had more than 10 years to implement the lessons learned there.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

WHAT's the single main cause of disability in the UK? What's the third biggest killer? And what's being done about it? Stroke, stroke... and nothing.

Each year 100,000 people suffer a stroke (one every five minutes) with often devastating consequences. Nearly 6 percent of the NHS/social services budget is spent on treatment, most of that on "rehabilitation".

Fortunately there is good evidence that patients treated in specialist units do better. In 1993 the *Lancet* published an overview of controlled trials between 1962 and 1993 comparing specialist stroke management with non-specialist. Patients treated in stroke units were 28 percent more likely to be alive after four months and 21 percent more likely to make it to a year. In nine out of 10 of the units, the patients also achieved "functional gains" (ie were less disabled after treatment).

In 1997 the *British Medical Journal* published a similar review which found that specialist care reduced the chances of dying or remaining physically dependent by 29 percent. If all patients had access to such care, more than 4,500 lives a year would be saved and another 6,250 patients would regain independence.

There is no systematic increase in the use of resources with such care and there is some evidence that hospital stays may be shorter. There is also the potential for huge savings in that many thousands of patients would not need longterm institutional care, nor draw disability benefits; and the burden on carers who currently put in 3.7 million hours a week would be much reduced.

The department of health has at least recognised that stroke care is a problem. It costs £2.3bn a year, with patients occupying 20 percent of acute hospital beds and 25 percent of longterm beds. The DoH's "Our Healthier Nation" targets include a reduction in the death rate from heart disease and strokes among the under 65 by a further third. However, despite a recent report by the Clinical Standards Advisory Group that found widespread variation in treatment and care, the government has yet to announce any national implementation for organised stroke care. If such a scheme had been implemented in 1993 when the evidence of benefit was clear, many thousands of patients would have been alive and free from disability. At present, the stroke care you or your relatives receive is a postcode lottery, with those who make it to a specialist unit 29 percent more likely to survive and regain independence. If there is no unit in your area, you should insist on being taken to one.

● AN unhappy Christmas was had at the Lifecare community trust in Caterham, Surrey. Chair Frank Birch resigned, chief executive Ian Semple went on "indefinite special leave" and six others were arrested and bailed as part of a fraud investigation into the subcontracting of services. Finance director David Healey has also taken special leave, while marketing and corporate planning manager Rosemarie Mitchell and works and estates manager Peter Poynter have been suspended.

● GLOUCESTERSHIRE barrister David Spicer has surveyed NHS managers and GPs in the county to gauge the level of understanding of the NHS Guidance on Child Protection following the Fred and Rosemary West case. Sixty percent of managers and 75 percent of GPs were not familiar with the guidance, and only a quarter of relevant NHS staff had received training. The health authority is cutting £100,000 from its health visiting budget this year...

● THE much trumpeted NHS league tables have turned out to be very incomplete. More than half the "clinical indicators" promised by then health minister Baroness Jay in July 1997 have not appeared. Measures of hospital-acquired infections, a range of surgical complications and deaths in hospital after surgery, are also absent. Thus most of us in the "modern, dependable" NHS still bumble on with little idea how we're doing. Happy new year!

M.D.

Rotten Boroughs

Hackney

HACKNEY council starts the new year in style with a settlement of £87,314 to Wendy Collins, the former borough valuer. She gets the cash for dropping her racial discrimination case against the council.

Borough solicitor Chris Hinde strongly urged councillors to make the payment to Collins, arguing that the alternative was a 30-day employment tribunal during which much mud would be thrown in the council's direction. But Hinde's secret report to councillors makes interesting reading.

It points out that Collins left Hackney in September 1997 when her post was deleted as part of restructuring. Nor does the borough solicitor hide the fact that at the time Collins was also facing disciplinary proceedings (which have never been concluded). The report abjectly fails to *mention* Collins' role in the David Chan saga earlier that year, however.

Chan, a valuer, had Collins as his line manager. And he successfully took Hackney to an industrial tribunal claiming... racial discrimination. He was awarded £120,000 and the tribunal condemned Collins for her discriminatory behaviour — not least because she called Chan a "chink".

Thoughtfully, Hackney's payment to Collins includes £6,082.93 interest which will come from the (already overspent) legal challenge budget.

Lambeth

EIGHTEEN months after the gas explosion that ripped through Kerrin Point, a council block in Lambeth which housed more than 200 people, the council has admitted in court that it is guilty of having breached the 1974 health and safety act on two counts.

Lambeth's admission that it failed to check the work of contractors and so put the lives of tenants and employees at risk followed the decision of the health and safety executive (HSE) to issue two summonses against the council. Also in the dock are contractor Staward Engineering Ltd and subcontractor Heating & Mechanical Services.

So powerful was the explosion that the 22 storey block is being demolished at a cost of more than £2m (repair would have cost nearly twice that). Lambeth's uninsured liabilities could be as high as £2m, and to compound problems the council has been notified that legal firm Hodge Jones & Allen has taken up the tenants' claim for compensation on a no win, no fee basis. More than half the tenants claiming compensation are said to be suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. They chose Hodge Jones & Allen because the firm previously represented Gulf War veterans suffering from the same condition.

In a secret report councillors were told they had no defence to either charge. Horseferry magistrates are yet to decide if the case should be heard at crown court where Lambeth would face an unlimited fine.

Manchester

MANCHESTER must do its bit in the national £2.7bn sale of local government assets, and the chief candidates for selling off are the council's grim, overspill estates.

These crime-ridden communities are outside the city boundaries in places like Langley and Hattersley (where the Moors Murders happened). Tenants on the overspill estates recently voted to stay in council control, but Manchester (which spent decades campaigning for the right to build them) wants rid of them and is deliberately running the estates down to force tenants out so it can sell on the sites to developers.

Dirty Anoraks

WIRING Hackney town hall to the internet for councillors' use has got the burghers over-excited. Chief executive Tony Elliston is investigating allegations that four councillors — two Tories, one Labour and a Liberal — have been downloading hardcore porn.

Leeds

SEEMINGLY dissatisfied with the media coverage it receives, Labour-controlled Leeds council is to spend £143,000-a-year on a propaganda sheet to be delivered to every household in the city.

The council's chief spin doctor Shirley Johnson says: "It is considered that the publication should be firmly identified with the city and the title 'Leeds' is suggested." Daring, no?

She also insists the paper will carry "unbiased factual information" on the council's activities. No doubt this will include an objective account of how the authority's sports centre staff were laid off without pay from November to January while their centre was refurbished.

Library News

IT's hardly surprising Islington is £800m in debt given the crackpot schemes of its leaders. The latest, which will add several million to the debt and blight a number of key sites in the borough, involves closing *all* ten libraries, sacking half the 150 staff and building five brand new so-called "beacon" libraries mostly open only at weekends with books largely replaced by internet access.

Taxpayers looking for a scapegoat when their already horrendous charges rise further can blame Jennifer Powell, head of information and customer services. She has made the astonishing claim that the current library buildings are in remote, isolated parts of the borough. She means traffic-clogged Essex Road and Holloway Road — one of the busiest routes in the capital.

Shetland

THE Shetland islands' housing department is £60m in debt — which is around £25,000 per house and not bad given that the average house costs around £10,000.

The huge debt was run up by previous governments who built houses for oil industry workers. But Labour has told the islanders it will only bail them out if the council "externalises" its housing service (privatisation in Toryspeak). Given that this is one of the most pressing problems Shetland has faced for years, taxpayers will be pleased to know that at a recent top level Scottish office meeting on Shetland only six of the islands' 26 councillors turned up.

Meanwhile attempts by councillors to dump new chief executive Nick Reiter have foundered. Reiter, former head of policy at Westminster during the homes-for-votes gerrymandering scandal, has been on "gardening leave" while councillors who had no idea of his murky past debated his suitability.

Independent investigator Ken Mackay, appointed under procedures laid down by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), has found it's too late to turn back now: Reiter must be allowed to take up his job. Canon Lewis Smith, Shetland council's convenor, will be particularly upset. As COSLA's vice-convenor he is obliged speak up for Reiter. As Shetland's convenor he wanted Reiter out.

Pseuds Corner

Dr [Edward] de Bono asked *The Times* to photograph him with a pot plant on his head. He said: "Normally you would never take [such] a photo. I thought we should make a point of that. It is showing ideas coming out of my head and it symbolises the value and richness of ideas."

The Times

It is always a gamble investing in a legend — a bit like Pascal's wager on Christianity — the myth may be true, it may be false, but since the potential rewards are so great, the clever man will bet on truth. In the sense that all legends are an act of faith, they are related to dreams and ideals. But where ideals project into the future, legends are desire projected backwards into the past. That is why around any legend there is always a whiff of nostalgia, spreading empathy where analysis should be.

This is a story about Harold Evans the legend, not Harold Evans as he is today...

SUZIE MACKENZIE
Guardian

When it came to styling the girls on this month's cover, health and beauty director Charlotte-Anne Fielder knew there was only one option. 'Versace,' she said breathlessly, holding on to the side of my desk to steady herself. 'Christmas *is* Versace!' And Versace it was — three gorgeously glittery chain-mail gowns designed to make men smile and women spit into their raspberry vodkas. Just how we like it.

So thanks, Charlotte, for furnishing me with my first true fashion moment as the new editor of *ELLE*.

FIONA MCINTOSH
Elle

Surely marketing is and will always remain a transactional-based function responsible for the designated tangible and intangible interactions between internal and external customers.

JAYNE-LOUISE WATKINS
Letter to Marketing Week

To ask if the artist has a moral responsibility implies, paradoxically, that the artist is not divorced from the social reality despite there being no empirical evidence that art has a function beyond the aesthetic. But asking the question at all amounts to a confession that society — and art — is in a crisis, and emphasises the inability of the Marxist or any other readily available vision to direct the way to the creation of a value structure which suggests the possibility of hope in the final few years of the twentieth century. The search for meaningfulness is as old as time, but during this climacteric there has never been a greater need for affirmation.

STEVE MARTLAND
Programme notes, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival

As a feminist, I consider Barbie an excellent role model — she can be anything and she is independent (the car is always Barbie's — as is the house, the stables, the swimming pool and so on — Ken is permitted to use them, but they belong to Barbie).

Oh — one point I really must make! Dea Birkett writes: "It's true to say that the only thing rigid Barbie can do with her legs is open them." As any little girl who has tried to sit a straight-leg Barbie on a horse knows, this is just not true. Barbie, like the lady she is, keeps her legs firmly together.

ELIZABETH LEE
(President, Barbie Collectors' Club of GB)
Guardian

CONTRIBUTORS: Sean McManus, Michael Wright, Pat Morris, Geoff Russell, Patrick Caulfield, Andrew C. George.

£10 paid for entries

DRUG DEALING

ALL is gloom at British Biotech, the once-glamorous drug company which has never produced a drug for sale but has still managed by a mixture of hype and hope to secure a hundred million pounds in the bank.

The most intractable problem facing the company is the determination of its former clinician Andrew Millar to clear his name and be properly compensated for the smear campaign the company waged against him. Millar was sacked when he had the gall to tell a shareholder that British Biotech was ignoring clinical trial results and exaggerating claims for its drugs.

He is being sued by the company for breach of contract and is countersuing for unfair dismissal, libel, etc. Largely because of his hamfisted handling of the Millar scandal, British Biotech's former chief executive Keith McCullagh "resigned" last summer with some £600,000 to cheer him on his way. He was replaced by Dr Elliot Goldstein, who came from SmithKline Beecham's Canada branch with a six-figure "golden hello", a salary of £350,000 and the usual millions of stock options.

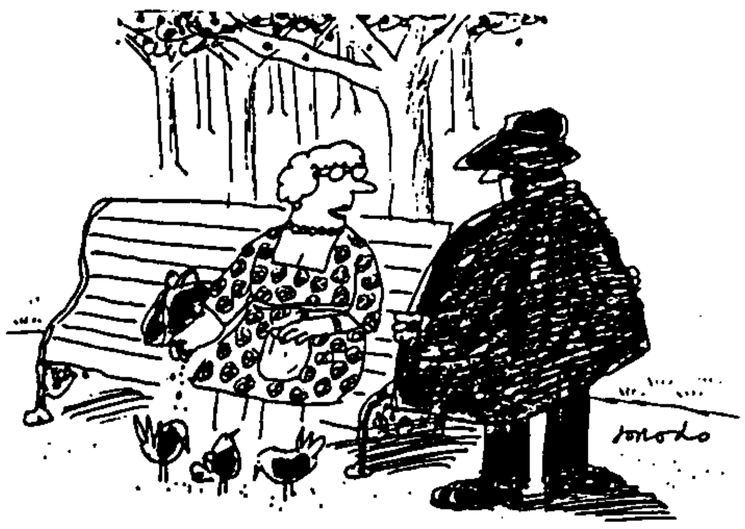
Though he has reined in the company's more ambitious hype, there are signs that Dr Goldstein is dealing with the Millar problem along the lines laid down by his cackhanded predecessor. In October, inspired by press reports that the company was anxious to settle his claims amicably, Millar wrote to Goldstein offering an "off-site, "off-the-record" "without prejudice" "without lawyers" meeting. Goldstein accepted at once and the two men met at the Four Pillars hotel at Sandford near Oxford. The discussion was polite with no definite conclusion.

On 13 November Millar was surprised to be asked about the meeting by city journalists on the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Telegraph*. They made it clear they had heard of the meeting from British Biotech. On 16 November, at a meeting with Perpetual, the shareholder to whom Millar had originally blown the whistle, Dr Goldstein announced that Millar was "a very difficult man to deal with". He complained that he couldn't even have a private meeting with Millar "without the details appearing all over the newspapers".

Infuriated by this episode, Millar has instructed his lawyers to step up his action on all fronts. Some of his costs are being met by the *Times* newspaper, which originally ran his story. He has now secured generous additional help from what the *Daily Telegraph* calls a "mystery benefactor".

The obstinacy of British Biotech in refusing promptly to settle Millar's claims may have something to do with the company's bankers, Dresdner Kleinwort Benson, who fear that to concede Millar's case could lead to the swift demise of British Biotech, leaving the bankers to stump up the compensation.

Other worries for the firm and the bankers are the inquiries by the American Securities Exchange Commission and the British Stock Exchange into Millar's allegations that the company bumped up its share price by circulating false or exaggerated information about its drugs. The American investigation is over — the *Eye* understands its implications are devastating for the company. The British Stock Exchange is taking the usual interminable time over its deliberations. If the conclusions are anything like as serious as in the US, they will have to go to ministers who until last May had close contacts with British Biotech. From November 1997 to May 1998, Keith McCullagh, the company's imaginative chief executive, chaired the government's working group of high-flying businessmen which advised ministers about the financing of high-tech companies.



"Morning, Vicar"

Letters

Missing the (decimal) point

Sir,

I would like to comment on your article about aortic aneurysms in Doing the Rounds (EYE, 21 August 1998).

In your otherwise excellent article you quoted an unnamed consultant as saying that "We're probably losing 60,000 men a year — enough to fill Old Trafford to the rafters — through not screening men over 50." The reference to Old Trafford shows that the figure 60,000 is not a misprint.

The actual death toll from aortic aneurysms is roughly 6,000 men and 4,000 women a year. Evidently, MD's consultant has got a decimal wrong and has ignored female deaths from aortic aneurysms.

This sort of mistake is deadly serious to coin a phrase since it discredits you with anyone who is numerate, ie any accountant, and who do you think runs the NHS these days?

Yours faithfully,
J.P. LETHBRIDGE,

Ward End, Birmingham.

Red letter day

Sir,

Re: My missive against your mean-tipping subscribers (EYE 965). It's the first time I've ever sent that letter and it worked a treat. I'm so glad I chose the EYE instead of IDEAL HOME. A happy and peaceful new year to all your many generous subscribers from myself and my colleagues and a libel free one to yourselves.

Yours faithfully,
THE JOLLY MR POSTIE,

Belfast 4.

Lookalike

Indestructible Man

Mandelson

Sir,

I have noticed a resemblance between "The Indestructible Man" ("Inhuman! Invincible! Inescapable!") eponymous hero of the 1956 horror film, and Peter Mandelson, lately secretary of state for trade and industry.

The Indestructible Man, who is wrongfully executed, sets out on a pitiless mission of revenge against those who betrayed him.

Do you think, by any chance, the two are related?

Yours faithfully,
MARTIN TITCHMARSH,

Cambridge.

Rhythm sticks

Sir,

John Bassett's little inventory of gay virtues (EYE 965) was heartwarming but I am surprised that, while he was at it, he did not mention our wonderful instinctive sense of rhythm.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID POCOCK,

Lewes, East Sussex.

Gee swizz?

Sir,

Re: Gee Spot, EYE 965. As a hard-pressed Lambeth council taxpayer I read with some astonishment Jim Gee's extravagant claim that in two years he had saved me and the other Lambeth taxpayers "tens of millions of pounds".

Mr Gee, I am sure, will be able to provide evidence of this. It is not reflected in my council tax bill, which is less but largely on account of the council now employing far fewer staff and providing fewer services. For many of the services provided, as the recently-published annual report shows, the council performed more poorly during 1997-98 by comparison with the previous year.

If Mr Gee detected fraud (and caused savings) amounting to tens of millions of pounds in just two years, the scale of the fraud he uncovered must have been massive and, in part, systematic undertaken by people conspiring to defraud hapless Lambeth council. Therefore Mr Gee should also tell us how many of the cases he investigated were referred to the police, how many prosecutions took place and what were the results? I am not aware of any Lambeth housing benefit cheats being up before the courts, or for that matter, any (former) Lambeth council staff?

Yours faithfully,
NICHOLAS LONG,

London SW4.

Fulcrum fantasy

Sir,

Re: Kes Wingfield. I'm afraid your latest attack on me is even less accurate than the previous rubbish you have written.

1. I never asked Wingfield for details of the conspiracy against Dodi Al Fayed and Diana. I talked to him solely about the events of that day and the summer to which he was a witness. Nothing more, nothing less. The conversation was friendly and he described both the day and the events of the summer in great detail.

2. I was not introduced to him as being from the DAILY MIRROR, but rightly as a producer with Fulcrum, working for ITV.

3. I did not meet him in Fayed's office.

4. I did not switch off my tape recorder, as he claims. I don't own one and in 25 years working in television I have never once used one.

5. Mr Al Fayed never entered the room and the conversation he claims never took place.

6. Kes Wingfield agreed to record an interview for the programme. We had arranged for the reporter and a crew to interview him in Scotland when he changed his mind.

7. Far from being relieved at not having to appear at the Tribunal, I was in fact disappointed not to have the opportunity to set the record straight and refute his entirely untrue account of our meeting.

8. Wingfield was not "the star attraction", though he was an important witness to the events of the day, particularly the threatening and unpleasant behaviour of the paparazzi.

9. Mr Al Fayed had no influence over the editorial content of the programme.

Still you got one fact right — I did actually meet him and you managed to spell my name right. The rest of your piece was based on a fictional account from him designed to help his claim for unfair dismissal.

Yours sincerely,
RICHARD BELFIELD,

Producer, Diana, Secrets Behind The Crash.

● *As we noted in our article on Mr Wingfield's tribunal, "Fayed's lawyer Matthew Reeve claimed Mr Belfield would furnish the court with a different version of events, to the extent of claiming that Fayed was not even present at the meeting in his own office." That version is presumably the one outlined here. The piece was indeed based on the evidence presented by Wingfield at the tribunal, as it made clear — we were unable to present any evidence from Mr Belfield, or any of Fayed's other witnesses, as the latter's sudden settlement of the case prevented them from offering any. If Mr Wingfield's account was "designed to help his claim for unfair dismissal", it appeared to work.*

Berkin.
(with acknowledgements)

ANOTHER AMAZING PEACE PROCESS!

Piloti — Don'tchalovehim?

Sir,

As someone who has lived and studied in Durham for four years, I would like to wholeheartedly agree with Piloti's report on the so-called Prince Bishops shopping development.

Piloti mentions that the Metro Centre is nearby. There is also, in addition to all the local small businesses now facing oblivion in the face of corporate competition, a fully-fledged shopping precinct (the Millburngate) which seems to serve the city perfectly well. It is approximately 30 seconds' walk from the new development. Having dominated our ecclesiastical skyline with two giant cranes for so long in the name of progress, no one involved with the Bishops has explained to us the logic.

NAME & ADDRESS WITHHELD.

... and aren'tchasickofhim?

Sir,

In your last issue Piloti took the authorities of Durham to task over the new "Land of the Prince Bishops" shopping development. However, by one prejudicial omission he shows the building in a worse light than necessary. As an ex-resident of the city and a recent visitor, I can confirm the new construction is undoubtedly bland in its over-sized aspect from Elvet Bridge and the Wear. What Piloti fails to mention, however, is that it is aesthetically far superior to the hideous multi-storey car park that occupied the site previously.

Although it is proper to doubt the feasibility of so many new shopping developments when there are (or, at least, were six or seven weeks ago) long-standing empty retail units in the Millburngate centre and North Road adjacent to Framwellgate Bridge, it is unfair to criticise the "Land of the Prince Bishops" so harshly. Granted, the complex is too large and far from perfect, but there are worse things in the world, and even Durham city.

Yours faithfully,
STUART HARE,

Croydon, Surrey.

Mall function

Sir,

Alan Plater has said that you can always get a laugh from a Newcastle audience by mentioning Gateshead. That's because Gateshead isn't in Newcastle, as Piloti seems to think, but across the Tyne in another county.

Yours faithfully,
ALAN MYERS,

Hitchin, Herts.

Giles circus

Sir,

Re: Bookworm's remarks about Curtis Brown's Scottish Christmas jolly (EYE 966), and in particular the vile aspirations cast upon the generosity of our esteemed and beloved agent, Giles Gordon.

I would like to point out that the Sophisticated Rottweiler's demand that his scribes pay for themselves was but a festive jape. It must have been, because in the end he paid for the lot with not even a sob escaping his lips. The fact that, as we entered his chosen pizza joint, he was seated at a table, rolled-up PRIVATE EYE in hand, glaring at us and hissing "Traitors!", had, I am sure, nothing whatsoever to do with it. I am sure he intended the treat to be on him from the outset, which is why we all felt entirely safe in not bringing as much as a bawbee with us to pay the bill. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Yours sincerely,
MEG HENDERSON,

Via e-mail.

A guinea pig writes...

Sir,

I must confess to a sudden bout of confusion after reading Mr Cazalat's letter "Porton Downer" in EYE 966, confusion to the extent I was concerned my Gulf War Syndrome was rearing its non-existent head once again.

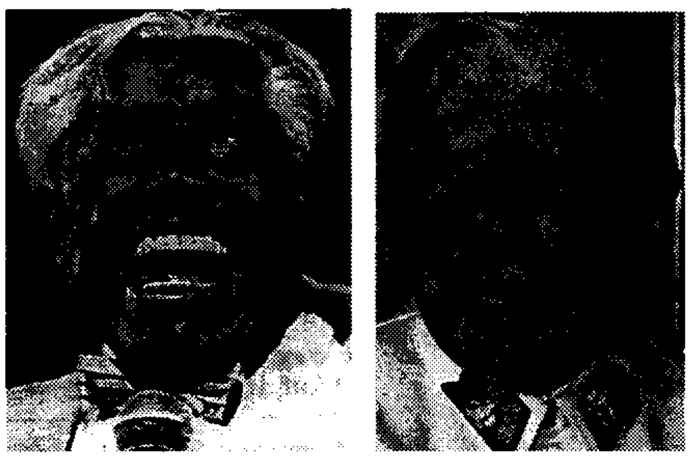
The Porton Down I was thinking of is the one that trains the NBC (Nuclear/Biological/Chemical) warfare instructors of the British Army and also requests "volunteers" from serving soldiers who are rewarded for their selfless devotion to research with direct financial remuneration. Having personally spoken to soldiers that have volunteered I have to say that the wearing of an NBC suit and S10 respirator is to me, a previously unknown technique of um... Cancer Research.

Still, I'm no scientist — I was just a guinea pig.

Yours faithfully,
NEXUS,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike



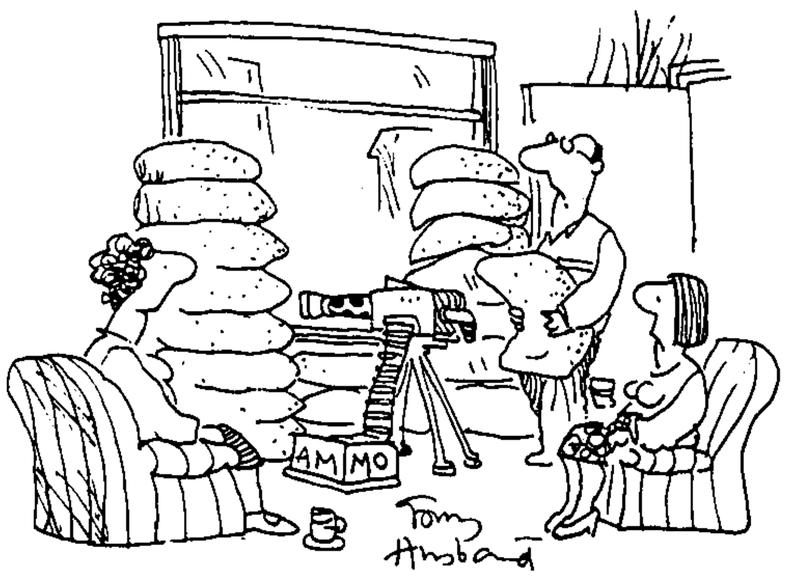
Pinochet **Calloway**

Sir,

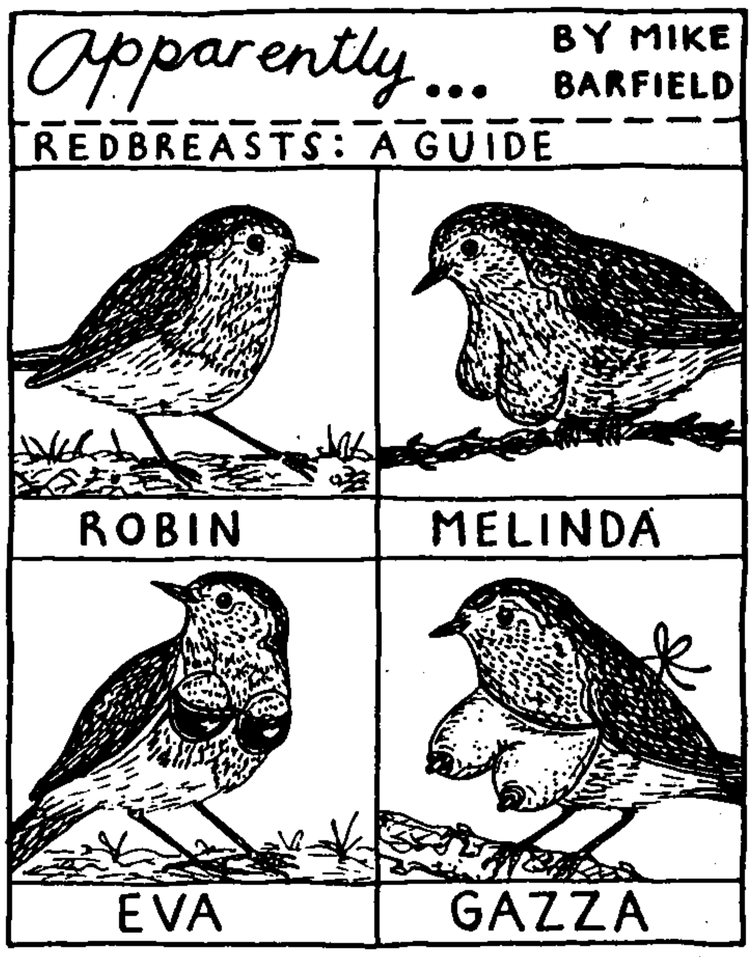
Has anybody noticed the astonishing resemblance between once energetic band-leader Cab Calloway and his fascist doppelganger General Augusto Pinochet, the former Chilean dictator now resident in leafy Surrey?

Yours sincerely,
ENA B. McGEOCH,

Wantage, Oxfordshire.



"Bernard's preparing for the Millennium"



Hart felt

Sir,

Kate Owen (EYE 965) is quite right to rap your knuckles over the Mo Mowlam lookalike. You have obviously, once again, forgotten the first rule of contemporary satire: that sort of thing is perfectly OK if the victim is a Tory. If it's at the expense of a poor, defenceless Labour cabinet minister who can't answer back, it is cowardly, vulgar, tasteless, offensive, nauseating and deeply unfunny.

I shall be renewing my subscription at the first opportunity.

Yours,
JOHN HART,

Malvern, Worcs.

Check this out

Sir,

Since it wasn't all that very long ago you were comparing a Somerfield checkout assistant's wage with a Somerfield executive's wage, you will of course understand why Couch Potato finds advert shop assistants "approximately 10,000 times more helpful than in real life" — it's because we shop assistants are paid approximately 10,000 times less than the actors who make the commercials. And, unlike your correspondents Messrs Postie and Dustman, Mr Checkout Assistant isn't allowed to accept tips before, during, or after any of his 13-hour checkout shifts.

Merry Christmas indeed.

Yours,
ALEX FOSTER,

Leominster.

Granada services

Sir,

It may have gone unnoticed by your correspondent regarding the awarding to Granada of ITV's new hour-long current affairs programme (EYE 966) that David Liddiment, ITV's director of programmes and one of the three members of the panel judging the bids, spent virtually his entire television career at, er, Granada!

Yours faithfully,
JEREMY HUNTER,

Via e-mail.

County counsel

Sir,

Bob Taylor (Off Our Trolley, EYE 964) suggests that if you "Have a map to hand..." you should "...look for Loch Leven in Fife".

Don't worry if you have been unable to find it because Loch Leven is in fact in the county of Kinross. Yes indeed, Bob, you are "...no surveyor".

Best wishes,
BRUCE SANDISON,

Via e-mail.

I-SPY

Iran

Submitted by Christopher Renwick. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Bob's-yer-benefactor

Sir,

I've just read all the way through the DAILY MIRROR's "Exclusive" story on Geoffrey Robinson's £373,000 bung to Peter (mushy peas) Mandelson, and nowhere do I find any mention of the source of his ill-gotten wealth.

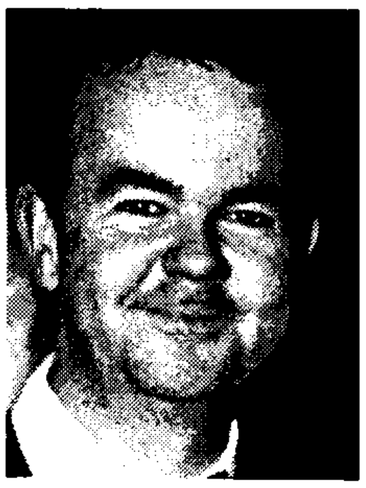
The MIRROR story refers to our Geoffrey getting rich from "a tangle of buy-outs and buy-backs", but strangely, the name of his backer and benefactor appears nowhere in the story.

Step forward the fat bloke — Cap'n Bob Maxwell! I hope poor Peter doesn't ever have a twinge of conscience at the thought of living under the roof of a house bought with Maxwell's tainted money — but then, like the DAILY MIRROR, it's a lot easier to pretend that he simply didn't exist.

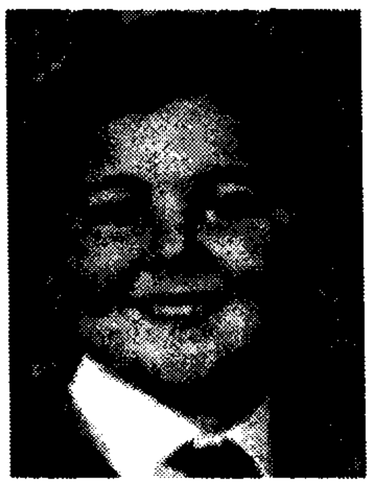
Yours, while bob-bob-bobbing along,
CHRIS PAUL,

Via e-mail.

Non-Lookalike



Child



Editor

Sir,

Whilst watching the new advertisement on BBC1 recently, I was amazed to see a young Ian Hislop walking through a variety of children's programmes, past and present. Even my mother thought there was a similarity between the two cherubic faces. Are we alone?

Yours faithfully,
L HEPWORTH,

Leeds.

● Er, I can't see the resemblance myself... but over 50 Eye readers seem to disagree. Ed.

Ball point

Sir,

I fear Paul Jones has failed to grasp the deeper meaning of Andy Gray's comments about French male model (shurely footballer?) David Ginola in Colemanballs EYE 965 ("It's not what Ginola does when he's got the ball, it's what he doesn't do when he hasn't got it.")

I am a professional translator. I used to play football a bit too. I am therefore uniquely qualified to interpret such "wisdom". As a service to readers, I would venture to suggest the following "translation": "Ginola's great on the ball, but he doesn't do his fair share of work off the ball." Simple really.

Keep up the good work,
BOYD VINCENT,

Via e-mail.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"That was only a yard away from being an inch-perfect pass."
MURDO MACLEOD, Radio Scotland
(Dave Henderson)

"It was the fastest-ever swim over that distance on American soil."
GREG PHILLIPS, Portsmouth News
(John Mainwaring)

"...fears that the balloon may be forced to ditch in the Pacific. Mr Branson, however, remains buoyant and hopes to reach America..."
Radio 4 News
(Lindsay McKee)

"Baghdad enjoyed another night of bombings..."
BBC News
(Louise Loane)

Simon Brotherton: *Well, Blackburn have lost five out of their last six, but they did win last week.*
Chris Kamara: *Yes, Simon, they'll want to keep this unbeaten run going.*
Radio 5 Live
(Carol Wood)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter From Jakarta

from Our Own Correspondent

IT's now seven months since former President Suharto of Indonesia, golfing enthusiast and mass murderer, was forced out of office. Seven months too since his personally approved replacement, B.J. Habibie, issued a "nation address" promising an end to "KKN" — the Indonesian acronym for the corruption, collusion and nepotism that formed the three pillars of Suharto's regime.

All has not gone smoothly. The assault on KKN has been at best patchy and at worst fatally weakened by, er, corruption, collusion and nepotism. After all, 30 of the 36 members of his "reform and development" cabinet are in fact familiar old cronies of Suharto, as keen to avoid nasty muck-raking as the foreign companies with whom he did business.

When, for example, it was revealed that Thames Water had signed a business deal with Suharto's son Sigit, the government promptly cancelled the deal. But following pressure from the British embassy (after all, contracts are contracts), a new deal was drawn up, this time with the "new" government as partner. Embarrassing demands to know why the new deal was not put out for competitive tender, however, spoiled much of the bonhomie.

After all this "new" government looks very much like the old. When the state oil company Pertamina was investigated, corruption to the tune of millions of dollars was uncovered in no time at all, much of it involving contracts signed by Pertamina with 159 companies owned by Suharto, his cronies and his family. Habibie's "new" government, of course, stepped in at once to take over these contracts. Companies like British Petroleum found themselves dealing all of a sudden with "new" partners to avoid the taint of scandal. But who do you think was a member of Pertamina's supervisory board of directors when the original deals were made? Er, step forward B.J. Habibie.

Habibie's commitment to open government seems a little soiled too now that his difficulties with the word "open" have been revealed. Progress so far is largely limited to the creation of an interactive Habibie homepage on the net, listing his 33 positions on boards and quangoes, his collection of awards and his hobbies; "reading and swimming". You'll find details here too of B.J.'s speedy presentation of two merit service stars, one to his wife, the other to his son.

Angry citizens wondering where this leaves his commitment to stamp out nepotism can send the Great Helmsman email "in the form of suggestions, comments and also questions", as long as they leave their names and addresses on file of course.

Back in the real world criticism is hardly welcome. When, last autumn, the TV station SCTV attacked B.J.'s economic incompetence, the state-owned bank Bumi Daya promptly called in its loans to the company, opening the way for the government to go for a majority stake in the channel. Any journalist wishing to write about this strange coincidence should remember that a proposal to license unruly hacks is currently up before his "new look" cabinet. And none of the laws used by Suharto to repress dissent has so far been repealed in the new quest for "open" democracy.

No wonder unrest continues in several regions as people reflect on the remarkable similarities between the old and new order. Ironically it's in the way the government deals with this civil disorder that the closest parallels emerge. B.J.'s military commander, General Wiranto, was also Suharto's. And the methods his army use are the same. There are still killings and "arbitrary arrests", according to Amnesty International. Sixteen people were arrested in October for raising an independence flag in Iryan Jaya, and 18 opposition politicians were questioned by police in Jakarta for being, well, opposition politicians.

In East Timor 50 people were killed during a military sweep through Alas province near Dili. Indonesian army documents smuggled into Australia reveal that despite denials from foreign minister Ali Alatas (another of the "new" cabinet's Suharto cronies), troop concentration in East Timor has risen by 11 percent, while military personnel still occupy all key government posts.

Amnesty says the new government has already "lost sight of its commitments". Elections are promised for next May. The trouble with promises, though, is they're sometimes hard to keep.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "I have been obsessed with toilets ever since I graduated from university," declared Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of the Sulabh International Toilet Museum in New Delhi. "India was the pioneer in toilets. Our Indus Valley civilisation had well-planned sewers and an almost modern sanitary system back in 2,500 B.C. Here in what I call 'the Temple of the Porcelain Deities,' we can trace toilet history back to the time when Moses told his tribesmen to 'cover your excretions with earth,' according to the book of Deuteronomy."

Conducting reporters around his museum, Pathak pointed out some important exhibits. "This is a replica of the 'rumble throne' used by the French King Louis XIII, who defecated publicly in court. France has always had the most ornate 'thunderboxes' in history, although modern sanitation only arrived there long after the rest of Europe. The Marquise de Pompadour had an exquisite commode made of gold, with a leather seat and Shantung silk chainpull. The museum also contains famous toilet photographs, including this one of Jerry Lewis, Bob Hope, and Dean Martin urinating side by side in a public lavatory. And this one shows Frank Zappa sitting with his pants down, while composing 'The Enchilada Bowel Movement.'

"Sadly, millions of people in modern India are outside the social pale because they still defecate in the open. Our organisation is working to stop this disgusting and evil practice. So far we have set up 4,000 public toilets and one million individual units in poor homes. My heroine is Cindy Crawford, the most toilet-conscious celebrity of our age. She carries her own portable seat with her. That is really very hygienic. She is a Goddess". *(Khaleej Times [Dubai], 14/11/98. Spotter: Anon)*

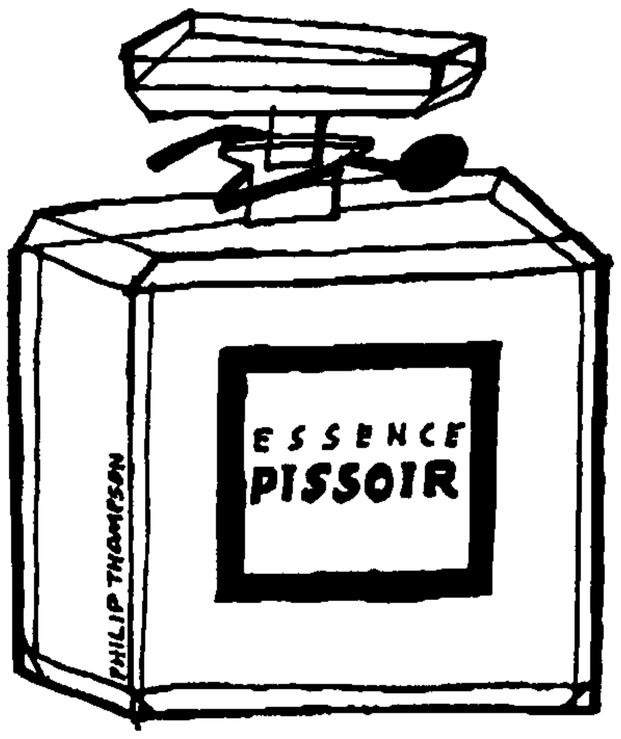
—●—

● "What's happening here is an entomological disaster," Andrew Dennis, Senior Conservation Officer for Queensland's Environmental Department, told a press conference. "The peppermint stick insect evolved its strong defensive scent over millions of years, using it to ward off predators. But it's now been driven to the verge of extinction by tourists, who keep poking it with twigs so they can smell the peppermint odour. The poor creatures are now spending so much time repairing their defence mechanisms that they're exhausted, and don't have time for the other things that are necessary for their survival, like feeding and reproducing. The ones in Etty Bay were especially valuable, because they only fed on pandanus palms and belonged to the rare group of parthenogenics — females able to reproduce without male assistance. Now they're all gone, and the ones at Cape Tribulation are almost extinct too. It'll be the Dodo story all over again. They stank too, apparently." *(Brisbane Courier and Mail, 17/11/98. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

—●—

●*""I first tested my new perfume on my way home," Cde Precious Swayo told a magistrates' court in Harare, "and I was mightily disappointed when I did not get the sweet and pleasant bouquet that I normally expect from a bottle of expensive French scent. When I got home, I tried it again, and this time I was hit by a pungent smell that made my nostrils burn. My husband said that I smelled like a cross between embalming fluid and glue. Then we both sniffed the container, and I finally realised that those men over there had sold me a bottleful of urine and vinegar for $30."*

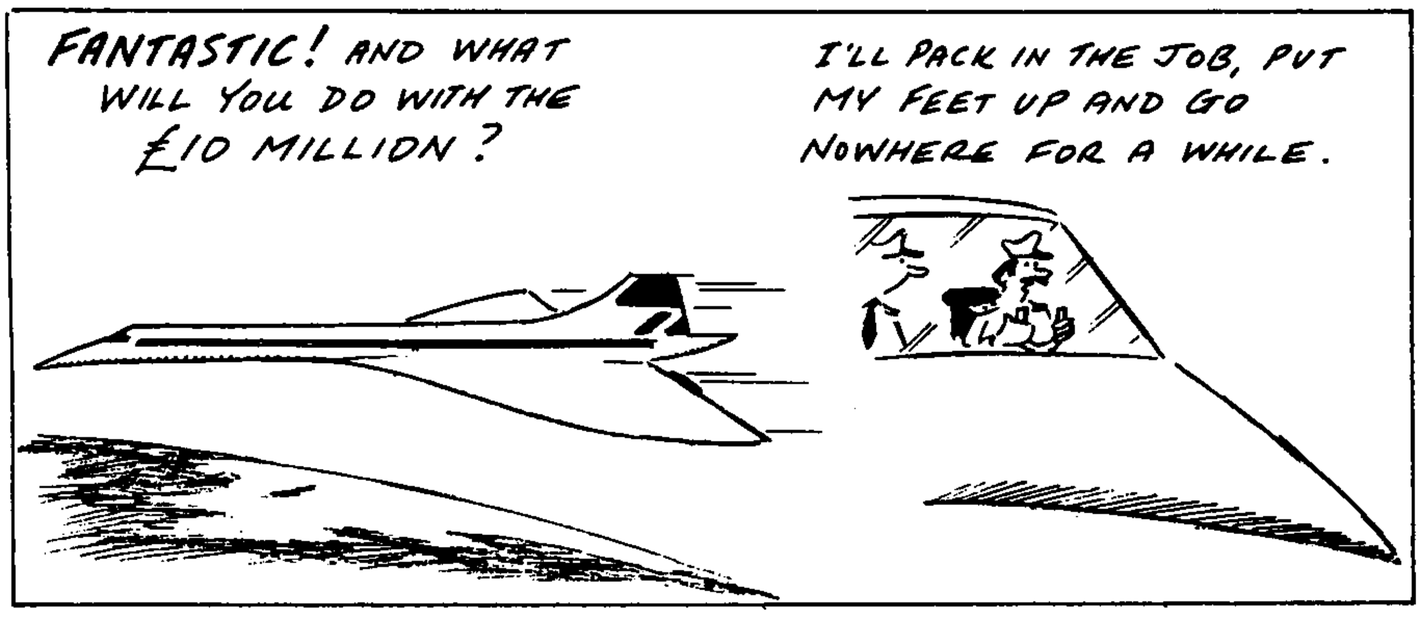
Before passing sentence on Captain Ngoshi and his accomplice Piko Gumbochuma, Magistrate Beck Maphosa told them: "You both



knew full well what you were doing when you set up your 'Heaven Scent' market stall, selling bottles of perfume with famous names like Guerlain, Cartier, and Chanel. When women approached your stall, you gave them a test bottle to try, which contained real perfume. But the sealed bottles you sold them contained nothing but your own piss and a dash of vinegar, which is not at all something that a lady wants to dab behind her ears. You have both displayed a high degree of criminal resolve and purpose, judging from the way the offences were perpetrated, and I therefore sentence you each to three months imprisonment." (The Mail [Zimbabwe], 2/9/98. Spotter: Ken Millar)

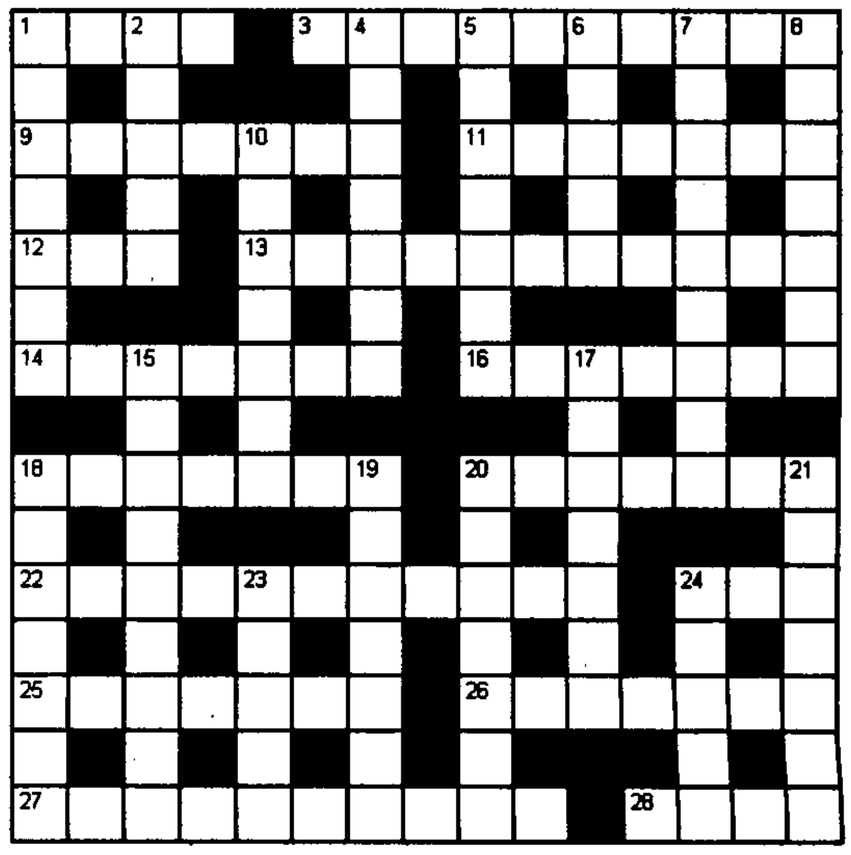
The Lottery Winners

TURNER



EYE CROSSWORD 122

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1/24ac/12/15 Hadn't been a movement during Straw's speech but it's all show (4,3,3,9)
3 Loose talk of unemployed having crack? Piss off! (4,6)
9 Colourless Gingrich, reportedly right next in line to Clinton (7)
11 (see 17)
12 (see 1 ac.)
13 (see 28)
14 New Labour result in Cheshire – Birt horrified (7)
16 Removing bra, Sian the Latin flower (7)
18 Own protection for bloke on date – a wishful character (7)
20 Who scoffed all the turkey? (7)
22 Show women as sex objects, youth gone, associated with fashionable High St. store (4,2,5)
24 (see 1 ac.)
25 Not pro-Europe shortly after a tangle (7)
26 Penis gets excited at very point of being absorbed (7)
27 Gets picture, perhaps, on front page – tries to avoid the flak (5,5)
28/13 Private Eye takes on wife-beating heavyweight, a role model for Jeffrey Archer? (4,11)

DOWN

1 Porter's month one balls up (7)
2 Offensive from Conservative blue ... (5)
4 ... stupid, devious old shit (7)
5 These are finally left after the first insertion in testes surgery (7)
6 The main leaders of our country engender another nightmare (5)
7 Law history – endless bungled mockery of justice (4,5)
8 End up with ad about genitalia (7)
10 Telegraph in red, having a new supply distribution system (7)
15 (see 1 ac.)
17/11 What boobs indeed Duchess took out and jiggled for family entertainment! (5,2,3,4)
18 Pitch made by a senior politician initially comes to a stop (7)
19 In a bar roughly grabbing a one-time flamboyant MP (7)
20 One loosely following the band? (7)
21 Embarrassed to snog such a reactionary type? (7)
23 Conceptions held by countryside assses (5)
24 One old politician, one excuse (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 15.1.99.
Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye,
6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 121

Winner: NERINA FRAMPTON

ACROSS: 1 (see 20) 9 Potsdam 10 Aga saga 11 Yahoo 12 Totem pole 13 Biopsy 14 Sky 15 Offa 19 Oats 20/1 ac./6 The decommissioning of arms 21 Pouted 23 Tory party 26 Rehab 28 Red Flag 29 Titania 30 Hereditary peers.

DOWN: 1 Dippy 2 Cut-throat 3 Madhouse 4 Inmate 5 Swastika 6 (see 20) 7 Idaho 8 Graveyard 13 Blow-torch 16 Fat chance 17 The Right 18 Doorstep 22 Oyster 24 Rider 25 Piled 27 Brass.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo! And a happy New Year to you all!

You notice I don't say a "Happy Old Year", and that's very much my theme this week!

At the beginning of 1999, we look forward to what is to come, not backwards at unfortunate events which may have happened in the past!

Which is why I won't be dwelling on Mr Mandelson's unexpected resignation as our Churchwarden. Or Mr Robinson's resignation from the PCC. Or Mr Whelan's resignation as Mr Brown's assistant.

I think we all know by now that Peter, through no fault of his own, borrowed some money from his friend Mr Robinson so he could buy himself a nice house.

What's wrong with that, you may ask?

Nothing is the simple answer!

There's nothing in the Good Book that says we can't borrow money from our friends!

After all, didn't Our Lord himself say "Greater love hath no man than this: that he lay out £373,000 for his friend"? *(Revelations 7.16)*

However, Mr Mandelson, being a man of very high principle, knew that he had done nothing wrong, which is why he resigned as our Churchwarden.

But this does not mean that Peter will be leaving the team ministry. No one has played a more important part in revitalising St Albion's and putting our parish on a modern, vital and pivotal footing than Peter (with perhaps one obvious exception, although modesty prevents me from saying who that is!).

Without Peter's vision and hard work, we wouldn't have the Millennium Tent.

It would be just standing there half-finished, with nothing to put in it!

And incidentally, if anyone does have any ideas of what to put in it, could they please send them in asap. But not to Peter obviously, since he's got to be out of action for a while, recharging his batteries!

And if I know my friend Peter, he's not going to be sitting round on the back pews for long, feeling sorry for himself over some supposed "error of judgement" that he never committed in the first place.

As I told Peter, when he stayed with Cherie and me at the vicarage the night after he resigned, "Look, Peter, I want you back at the centre of things, as soon as the dust settles. Although there isn't any dust to settle, obviously!"

And I'm sure everyone in the parish feels the same way! All decent people, that is!

Not those sneerers and snipers who

could never understand how much we all owe to Peter — a lot more than the piffling sum he owed to Mr Robinson. "Money can't buy you love," as it says in the *Gospel According To St John and St Paul*!

So, that brings me back to my real message to you all this New Year.

We're going to move forward, looking ahead! And not look back over our shoulders at what may or may not have happened in the past!

Which is why, on New Year's Eve, when Cherie and I and the kids were seeing in the New Year in the Seychelles (largely at our own expense, please note!), I got out my guitar and led them in a chorus, not of *Auld* Lang Syne, but *New* Lang Syne!

Surely that's the right note on which we should all be approaching the New Year and the New Millennium!

Yours,

Peter's friend,

Tony

MESSAGE FROM THE CHURCHWARDEN, MR MANDELSON.

I resign.

PS. I know where you live, Gordon! And I'll get you for this one, if it's the last thing I do. P. M.

To Remember In Your Prayers

Mr Charles Whelan, who had a very difficult Christmas coming to terms with his feelings of guilt over what happened to Mr Mandelson. He may have thought he was being helpful in some way to his friend Mr Brown, our Treasurer, but frankly there are certain things which are more important than loyalty to Mr Brown, and those include loyalty to the vicar of this parish and his friends. Obviously, Mr Whelan did nothing wrong, but he was quite right to resign (even though he took his time!). T.B.

Your Letters...

Dear Sir,

Thank goodness we've finally seen the back of that humbugging toady Mr Mandelson with his rich friends and his fancy houses and stupid mobile phones. Can we now get back to some proper, old-fashioned, decent, traditional, honest

Yours sincerely,
J. Prescott,
The Working Men's Club.

As Editor, I reserve the right to cut all letters for reasons of space. A. Campbell

Dear Sir,

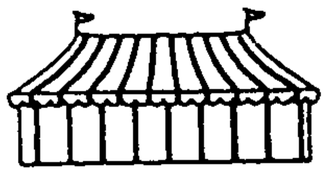
I cannot believe that someone so charming as darling Peter can be treated so barbarically and cruelly as though he were some common, ordinary little

Yours faithfully,
Lady Carla Powell,
The Old Thatch Cottage.

Even letters from wealthy supporters of the vicar may have to be edited due to the aforementioned pressures of space. A.C.

The vicar and Mr Blunkett tell the kids at St Albion Primary how important it is *not* to miss school. (In most cases! T.B.)

Welcome!



I am delighted to announce that my very old friend Mr Falconer is to take over running the Millennium Tent from my other very old friend Mr Mandelson. Although Charlie has no obvious experience in this line (!) I am sure he will do a wonderful job. So, let's all give him 100% support just like we did to Mr Mandelson before he had to resign for not doing anything wrong. If you want to get Charlie going just ask him round for a coffee and play him some B sides from your old record collection! He's particularly good on the New Riders of the Purple Sage (not the *old* ones obviously!!). And Charlie has already got a great idea for the Millennium Tent. It's a "Sixties Zone". Talk about the Rock and Roll of Ages!

PS. Sorry to Mr Prescott — Charlie just pipped him to the post for this job! Nothing personal! T.B.

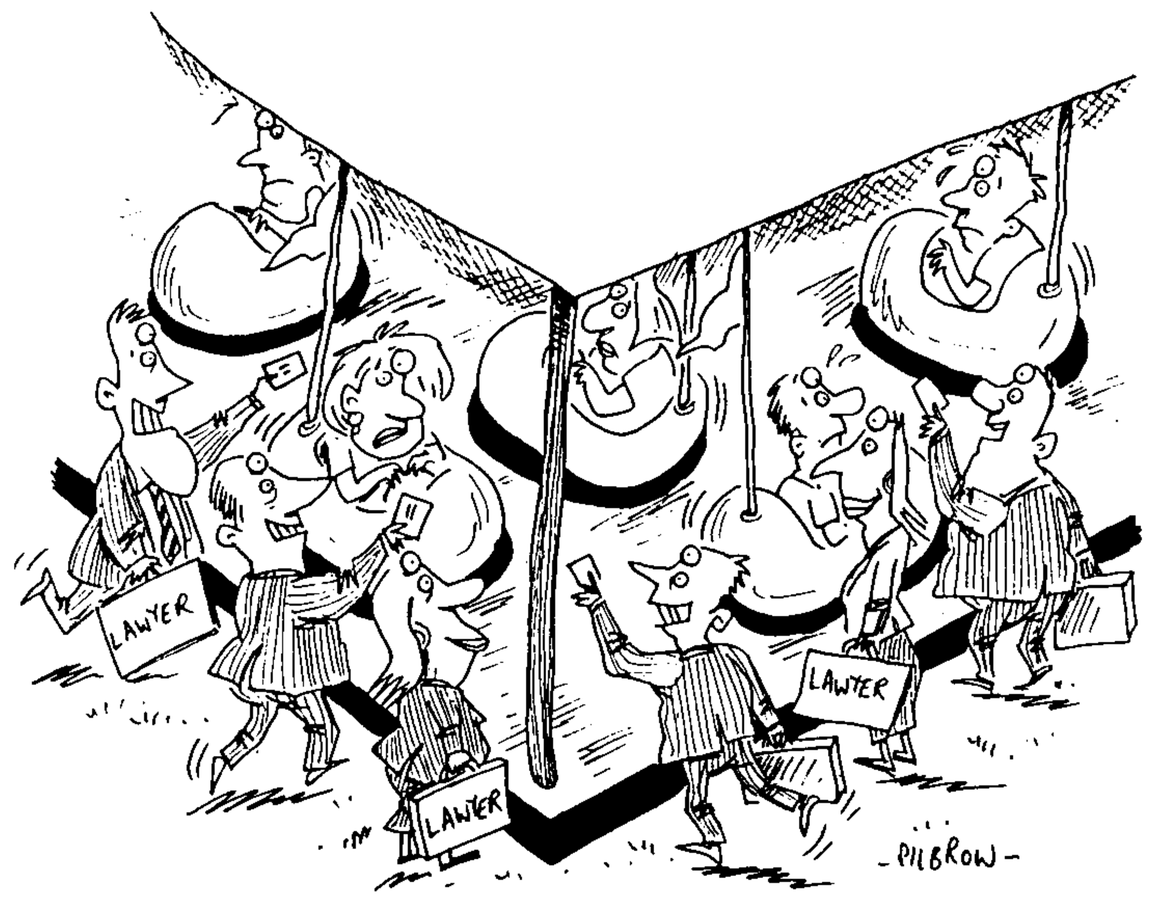
HOW THE BIG STORY OF 1999 BROKE

by **Our Entire Staff**

AS 1999 dawns the whole country is interested in only one question, "Who leaked the top secret proofs of the book that Paul Routledge had written, but which was sent by mistake to the wrong address, or was it, and then ended up on the desk of the Editor of the Guardian or was it the Mirror?"

THE TIMETABLE OF DISASTER

It was at 4.37pm on December 21st that Peter Mandelson's top aide, Oofy Wegg-Prosser, received an anonymous phone call warning him that Charlie Whelan had tipped off the Daily Mirror that a fax had been sent to Geoffrey Robinson's office detailing a letter sent by Gordon Brown to Paul Routledge accusing him of leaking the contents of a confidential post-it note to ***(continued on all pages)***

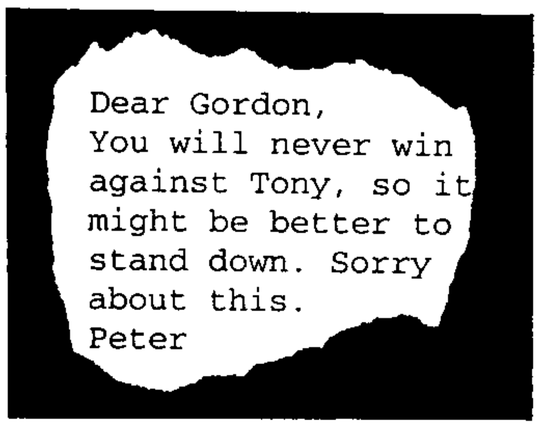


Bumper Cars in the US

MIRROR

IS THIS THE MOST EVIL LETTER EVER WRITTEN?

by Editor Piers Moron


Dear Gordon,
You will never win against Tony, so it might be better to stand down. Sorry about this.
Peter

THIS IS the treacherous note that Peter Mandelson viciously sent to Gordon Brown during the Labour leadership contest in 1994. No wonder that we now put it on the front page, so vile is its tone and so disgusting are its contents and *(cont. p. 94)*

A Spin Doctor writes

AS a spin doctor I am often asked, "Will you resign or do I have to sack you?" The simple answer is, "Yes, of course I'll resign, but you haven't heard the last of me, matey. I know where the bodies are buried you bastard you'll regret this" *(continued 2094)*

LATE NEWS

NEW JOB FOR MANDELSON?

THE ex-minister for Trade and Industry, Peter Mandelson, may take a new full-time job as Labour MP for Hartlepool, a position some have said won't suit his credentials as an ex-minister in the Blair cabinet.

Said a spokesman for Mandelson: "Someone said to Peter, 'Why don't you do the job you were elected to do and represent the interests of your constituents here in Hartlepool?' "

(Reuters)

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

SCOTSMAN IN SUIT TO GIVE UP JOB

by Our Political Staff
New Dawn Primarolo

A SCOTSMAN in a suit is to give up his job in Whitehall it was learned today.

The Scotsman gave no reason for his surprise decision, but said that he had done nothing wrong.

ON OTHER PAGES

My brilliant friend the Scotsman in a suit by Paul Routledge **3**

Was the Scotsman in a suit the world's most powerful man? **4**

Can the government survive without the Scotsman in a suit? **6**

Which man in a suit will replace the Scotsman in a suit? **7**

ST CAKES MAN QUITS

by Our Educational Staff
G.C.S.E. Failure

THE headmaster of the preparatory school attached to St Cakes (St Biscuit's — Motto "Magister Amat Pueros") has resigned following complaints that he had been guilty of "inappropriate behaviour" towards his pupils.

Mr P.D. O'Phile, the Irish born headmaster, was accused of taking nude geography lessons and introducing mud wrestling as part of the morning service in the school chapel.

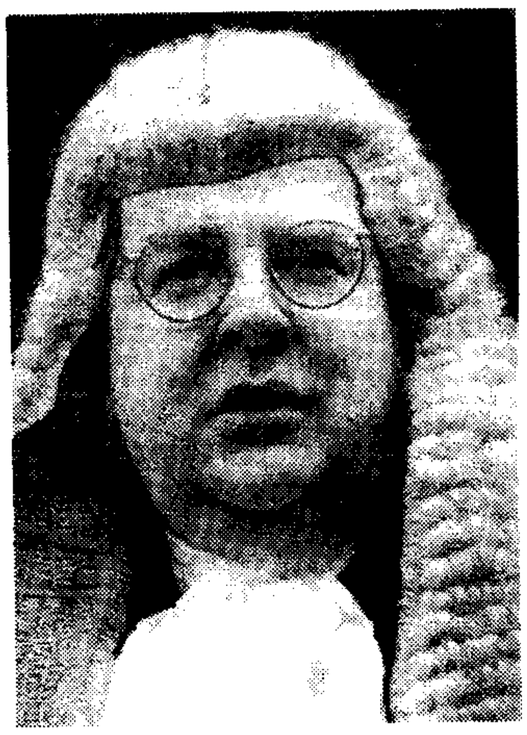
WACKFORD QUEERS

Parents, however, rallied to the support of Mr O'Phile, saying that they wanted their children to enjoy a traditional English prep school education of the type they had experienced themselves.

Said one parent, "It would be a sad day if the headmaster of a school is not allowed to climb into bed with his own pupils."

PROFILE

THE MAN TO LEAD US INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM — LORD FALKENDER



AT 58, Lord Falkbender stands at the threshold of the 21st Century. He is the ideal figure to take charge not only of the Dome but the entire Millennium Experience. Charles Leslie Forklifter is intensely able, with a brilliant brain and first-rate glasses. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Sixties hits, often has his shirt hanging out of his trousers and, most importantly, went to school with the Prime Minister.

Before joining the Government he earned well over £1 million a day in brief fees and colleagues recall his extraordinary mastery of jurisprudential case law. He is best known perhaps for his stunning out-of-court settlement of the case of Mrs Doris Prunehat vs. Shipley's Herring Spread when after an all night lunch in the Garrick *(continued p. 94)*

© Alastair Campbell

The Daily Headleygraph

CHRISTMAS MIRACLE! Unto Us A Star Is Born — Unto Us A Test Is Given

By Our Entire Staff

THE WORLD held its breath when early this morning news came through of the most extraordinary event in history — England had won a Test Match.

At 7.42 am it seemed all over for England. The same old story. Australia needed only three runs to win with nine wickets left to fall.

But then came the miracle.

The first sign that something very strange was happening was when a mysterious star appeared at the eastern end of the ground. It was Dean Headley — and, incredibly, he began to bowl directly at the stumps.

Everyone marvelled at this sight — especially the Australian batsmen, who were so startled that they just stood and watched as ball after ball thumped into their wickets.

And there arose a mighty chorus of supporters singing "Headley, Headley, Headley" and "Glory to Gough in the highest".

And, lo, by 7.46 it was all over. Australia were all out for 162. England had won the Fourth Test.

And an entire nation went mad with joy — especially the editors of newspapers, for they had something to fill up their pages on Christmas Holiday Tuesday and Wednesday.

Inside

The Melbourne Miracle **1,2,3, 7,9-24,94**

Why New Labour Means New Cricket by Sports Minister Tony Banks **26**

Is Stewart Man Of The Millennium? asks W.G. Deedes **24**

Why England's Test Win Means We Should Stay Out Of The Euro by Charles Moore **25**

LATE NEWS: England crash to 3-1 Ashes disaster after Fifth Test collapse

TV Highlights

Shirley Valentine Cook

ROMANTIC comedy about a spurned wife of a Foreign Secretary who goes on a summer holiday to Ecuador and falls for the charms of a local guide. They enjoy a passionate affair in the steamy South American jungle, but at the end the audience is left wondering whether it was all just the older woman's dream...

Cast In Full

Margaret Cook . . . . . .PAULINE COLLINS
Robin Cook . . . . . .NOEL EDMONDS
Don Casanova di Legovero . .TOM CONTI

The Times

Popular Names

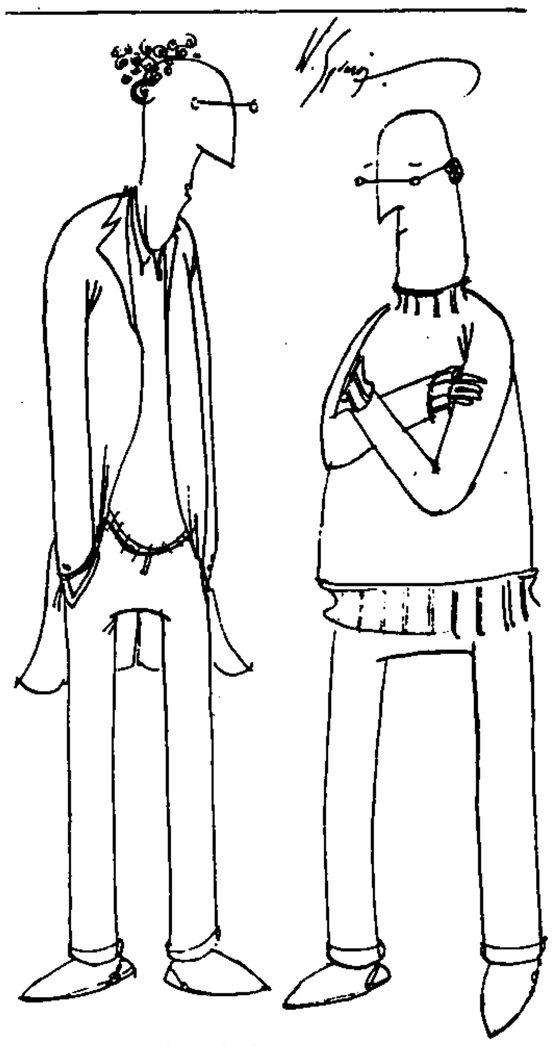
Sir, As is traditional at this time of year, I have compiled a list of the most popular boys' and girls' names in the year 1998.

Boys	Girls
Rupert	Elizabeth
Lachlan	Elizabeth
Rupert	Elizabeth
Rupert	Ruperta
Rupert	Elizabeth
Sky	Skyella
Jiang Zemin	Wendy Deng

This year, however, no fathers want to call their sons Christopher, Chris, or Patten.

Likewise, no mothers would dream of calling their daughters Anna or Mrs Murdoch.

Yours,
P. STODDART,
Duneditin,
Wapping.



"Why did you go to a psychiatrist? You must need your head examined!"

VIRGIN MAN'S HEROIC ATTEMPT FAILS

by Our Travel Correspondent **Norman Balloon**

THE BRITISH traveller, Ken Punter, 56, yesterday gave up his third attempt to reach Manchester from Bournemouth by rail.

Ken set out last Monday on his record breaking bid with high hopes.

"It was my third attempt to make the journey and I was confident of being the first person ever to arrive anywhere on a Virgin train."

VIRGIN BUFFOON

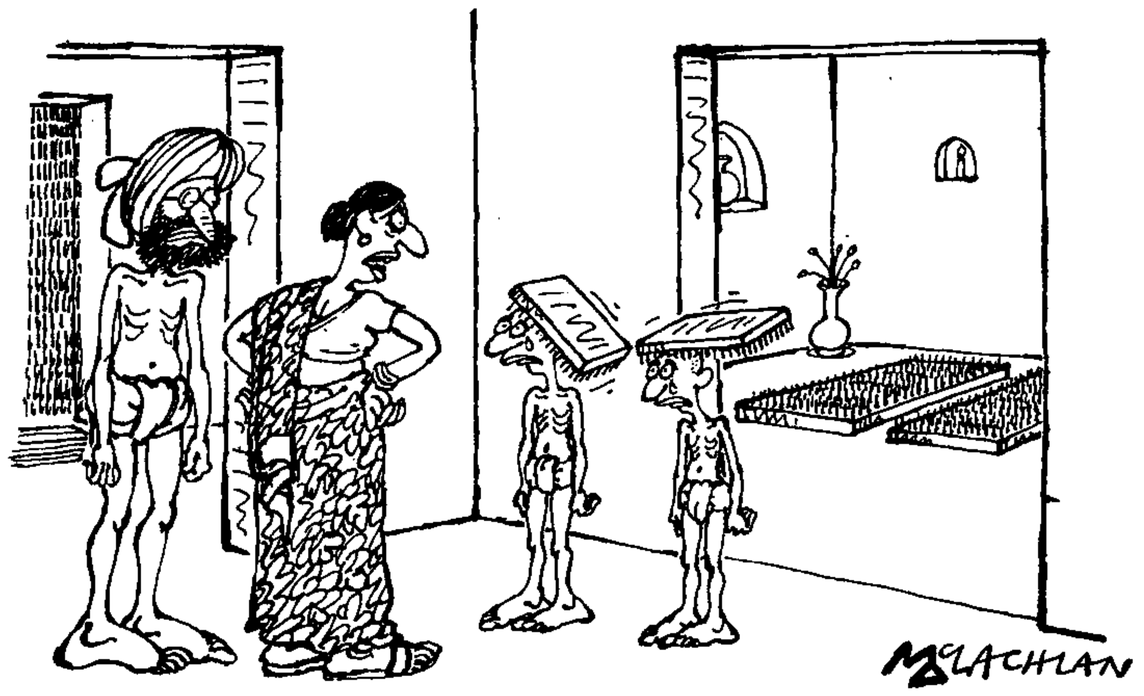
But Ken was to be disappointed. At 11.43am on Thursday his wife received the following message by mobile phone:

"Hallo, darling. I'm still on the train. I'm just outside Reading and there are mechanical problems again. The train is being taken out of service. I just can't face it any more. I'm going to give up and take a cab home."

But later Ken Punter gave a press conference and refused to be downhearted.

"I shall try again," he told reporters from his Bournemouth semi-detached. "People say the Age of Adventure is dead, but I say you just try getting somewhere on a Virgin train."

Richard Branson is 58.



"What have I told you about having pillow fights!"

MY FRIEND STALIN by Robert Harris

I NEVER thought I would say that I feel ashamed to be a journalist. But the recent press treatment of my old friend Joe Stalin has been so grotesque, so brutal, so lacking in any compassion that I have been shocked to my core.

Uncle Joe, as he is affectionately known to my children, could not be more different from the man we have read about in countless newspaper profiles and biographies. They present a picture of a ruthless, cunning, manipulative, megalomaniac scarcely recognisable to those of us who know the real Stalin, a kindly old gentleman who is marvellous with children and who is the life and soul of any dinner party.

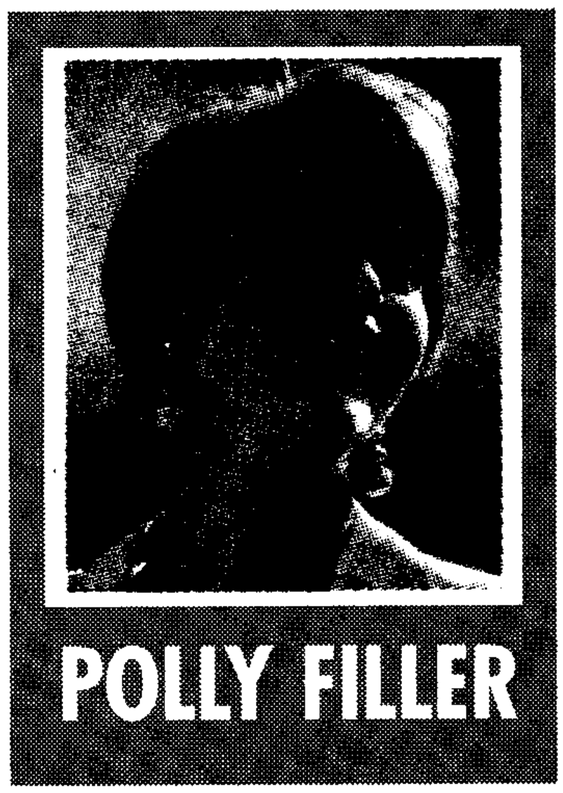
And what is Joe supposed to have done wrong to merit all the abuse heaped on his innocent head?

Sure, he made a few mistakes, but then who hasn't? Which one of us, given supreme power, would not act in exactly the same way as Stalin?

If the press carries on like this there will be no one left in politics with any talent, ability, charisma, flair or secret bank loans with dodgy businessmen (Surely shome mishtake? Ed.).

When I think of my friend Peter Stalinson, I see him sitting quietly in my orchard with his dogs at his feet, lovingly carving a wooden doll for his godson, Adolf *(continued p. 94)*

The Eye's Exciting New Columnist!!



THIS year I have decided once again to give up smoking. And I have decided that my partner Simon will as well. The first couple of days were murder and I nearly *did* murder Simon when he sneaked off for a quick fag under the guise of taking our two year old Charlie for a walk in the park.

Men — they're as much use as a dishwasher that packs up on Christmas Day! (See last week's column.)

And, to make matters worse, the Nanny came back all weepy and homesick after her father's funeral in Croatia — honestly, these girls are so selfish. Can't she see I've got enough on my plate looking after a pathetic, helpless, male baby, ie Simon, who has been in a foul mood because he's been staying up all night to watch the American Football on Sky TV without the benefit of his beloved fags. (As I remarked to a girlfriend recently, "fags" are what men *are* deep down anyway, let's face it.)

I lasted without a cigarette until Jan 6th, which wasn't bad going given how chaotic my life has been, what with the January Sales and the hoover bag needing changing. Dismal Simon, on the other hand, only made the first quarter of the Superbowl play-offs. Pathetic!

We have both, however, kept one resolution. We decided that the misery guts Nanny would have to give up smoking — or give up her job.

And so far she is doing very well indeed. It's all about willpower.

Happy New Year to all my readers.

LABOUR'S CLASS SIZE TRIUMPH

by Our Education Staff **Lunchtime O'Ratory**

MR David Blunkett, the Education Secretary, heralded the dawn of a new educational era as he announced the latest figures for class sizes in London schools.

"On the first day of term we have successfully reduced class sizes by a staggering *three* pupils.

"Schools like the Brompton Oratory and Islington Primary, which formerly had classes with too many children in them, today had one less pupil in a fantastic *three* classrooms."

He continued, "We hope that this trend will continue until the Prime Minister and his family get back from the Seychelles."

Tony Blair is on holiday.

Yobs
HUSBAND
It's the Millwall mob. They want to battle us on friday at eight
I can't, I promised to take my Gran to Bingo
He said is Saturday ok then?
Yeah, fine

EURO BANK HOSTS FIRST-EVER BORES CEREMONY TO BE HELD OUTSIDE UK

by Our Euro-Bores Staff **Jacques Santer**, **Lionel Jospin**, **Gerhard Schroeder** and **Will Hutton**

IN A historic, mould-breaking first-ever departure from 1000 years of history, Britain has ceded sovereignty over the Gnome Bore of the Year Awards Ceremony to Brussels; which is why this year's ceremony was held in the boardroom on the 48th floor of the HQ of the new European Central Bank.

Thus it was that instead of Mr Emmanuel Strobes, the unlikely figure of **Mr Wim Duisenburg** stepped forward to introduce the ceremony in fluent Dutch, before a specially invited audience of leading European celebrities.

"It is my great honour," he said, "to bid welcome to Lord Gnome's famous awards, which are to be hosted on this occasion by that great representative of European culture, **Ms Ulrika Jonsson**."

At this the leather-clad former meteorological predictionist stepped forward to perform her party trick of draining a 568-centilitre, pint-style glass of Kronenbore lager in one gulp (subject to EC health and safety regulations).

Her astonishing feat was greeted by the evening's first round of snores, while she hastily moved on to read out the shortlist of nominees for the coveted Grand Bore of 1998 Award.

"The candidates in this most boring of years," she droned, "were inevitably all long-running scandals of such complexity that they plumbed the very heights of tedium.

"They are: Clintongate; Drapergate; Sandlinegate; Robinsongate; Nottinghillgate; and Billgate(s).

"The judges found it very difficult to deny the prize to **Mr Gates**, a man who becomes 7.5 percent more boring every hour," she announced. "But in the end they decided that for sheer sustained monotony of the very highest order nothing could compete with the joint efforts of **President Clinton**, **Mr Kenneth Starr** and **Miss Monica Lewinsky**."

Anyone wishing proof of how richly this award was merited was then invited to inspect the 38 truckloads of evidence which were wheeled onto the stage.

AMBROSE EVANS-PRITCHARD

AT THIS point, while **Ms Geri Halliwell** sang "Hail To The Chief Fornicator", the President of the United States accepted a giant euro made from Belgian chocolate, and embarked on a three-hour apology in which he begged the whole world's forgiveness for doing nothing wrong.

He then thanked his wife Hillary for so loyally standing by him and explained that she was sadly unable to be at the ceremony due to the fact that she could not bear to be seen with him in public ever again.

The President then burst into tears and sought consolation of an inappropriate nature with the scantily clad Ms Jonsson.

BENJAMIN WEGG-PROSSER

THE ROLE of hostess was then passed on to **Sir Stephen Fry** who explained that, in response to charges that the Bore Awards had traditionally ignored leading minority groups, there was to be a major new "affirmative award" for the "Gay Bore of the Year".

Amid renewed snores from the audience, Sir Stephen, wearing only a white silk dressing gown and a pink carnation, read out the list of nominations: "Mr Ron Davies; the late Oscar Wilde; Mr Nick Brown; Mr George Michael and the late Peter Mandelson."

At this point, a contingent of BBC daleks, representing the Director-General of the BBC and Chief Dalek Mr "Sir" John Birt, swarmed onto the stage threatening to exterminate all those present if Mr Mandelson's name was mentioned again.

Sir Stephen, with his legendary quick wit, replied "Bugger me, then it had better be the other Peter — **Peter Tatchell**."

There was no laughter as the courageous antipodean blackmailer strode up to the microphone and began to read out a list of gay bishops.

He was promptly wrestled to the floor by the bulky figure of Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, shouting: "Tatchell, Tatchell, Tatchell, Out, Out, Out!"

HENRY DENT-BROCKLEHURST

AS assorted homosexuals and archbishops were removed by members of the Nation of Islam, who had been hired as security for the evening, the audience was diverted by **Miss Nicole Kidman**. The celebrated actress re-enacted the award-winning scene in which she removed her clothing to a chorus of leading drama critics shouting "An electrifying moment of theatre comparable only with the death of King Lear", "We have seen nothing like it since the blinding of Oedipus" and "Get your kit off, darling".

During this performance waiters passed round Memorial Vegetable Burgers as a tribute to the late **Dame Linda McCartney**, animal lover, photographer, mystic and purveyor of ethical foodstuffs.

At this point the stage was reinforced to bear the weight of the presenter of the next award, **Miss Vanessa Feltz**, who demanded £5 million before she would agree to read out the winner of the Group Bore Of The Year.

Having accepted a cheque singed by Sir John Birt on behalf of his licence-payers, Ms Feltz read out the shortlist:

"Mr James Boyle and his executive team, responsible for the new scheduling on Radio Four; Mr Charlie Whelan and his fellow New Labour spin doctors; Lord Cranborne and his 750 fellow hereditary peers.

"But the judges narrowly decided that the winners of this award should be the year's 324 top TV cooks, headed by the doyenne of them all, the great **Delia Smith**."

Guests were then treated to an hour-long demonstration by Ms Smith of how to make a cup of instant coffee, with contributions from Mr Keith Floyd, Mr Ainsley Harriot, Mr Nigel Slater, Mr Michael Barry and the Two Fat Ladies.

As the last-named clambered onto the stage to join Miss Feltz, the entire structure collapsed, bringing this section of the proceedings to a premature conclusion.

ANTHONY WORRALL-THOMPSON

WHILE the stage was being repaired by a team of crack engineers flown in from the extension to London's Jubilee Line, **Ms Denise van Outen** was lowered from the ceiling on her famous Paula Yates-style bed, to announce the Most Boring Couple of the Year.

"This year," she said, reading with some difficulty from the autocue, "there has been, oh, I can't quite see the next bit, oh yes, there's been a lot of stiff competition, ooh, that sounds rude, have they all been on the Viagra again? (This joke remains the copyright of the scriptwriters to Sir Christopher Evans OBE)."

As the audience fell into paroxysms of slumber, aided by the asphyxiating fumes given off by the plates of uneaten veggieburgers, she read out the shortlist as follows: Mr David Beckham and Miss Posh Spice; Mr James Major and Ms Emma Noble; Miss Kate Winslet and Mr Leonardo DiCaprio; Mr Frank Johnson and Lady Lavinia Starborgling; Miss Anthea Turner and someone else's husband whose name we can't remember; Mr William Carling and someone else's wife whose name we can't remember; and Mr Rupert Murdoch and his lovely new fiancée Miss Dim Sun.

"And the winner is, ooh, **Mr Mick Jagger** and his current wife **Miss Jerry-Lou Hall**."

No sooner had the elderly couple mounted the stage, Miss Hall breast-feeding her latest designer baby Master "Dirk" Beauregard Jagger, than a bevy of pregnant 19-year supermodels abseiled onto the platform, all screaming "I want to have Mick's money, I mean baby!"

A team of divorce lawyers headed by Mr Anthony Julius then applied for fees totalling £10 million before they could agree to act for any of the parties.

CANDIDA LYCETT-GREEN

THE lights then dimmed and a piece of solemn music specially written by John Taverner was sung by TV's Lesley Garrett.

The audience gasped with ennui as **Her Majesty The New-Look Queen** jogged onto the stage in a shell suit and trainers to

announce a special award for "A Lifetime's Contribution To Boredom Over Half A Century".

"The winner," she said, "is a lovely boy, who's done really well. So let's have a big hand for your future king, ha, ha, only joking Charlie, a big hand for my son and heir, the **Prince of Wales**."

The heir to the throne then held the audience in rapt sleep for several hours with a speech ranging over a wide variety of topics, including:

- organic trousers;
- alternative bed socks;
- genetically modified watercolours;
- post-modern turnips;
- the insanity of his late wife;
- what a good egg Camilla is.

The guests were roused by a fanfare of trumpeters from the Household Cavalry, playing the theme song from *Friends*, while **Mrs Parker-Bowles** took over as hostess for the next section of the evening.

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN-JENKINS

"THE entries for Sporting Bore of the Year," said the illustrious horsewoman, "are as follows: Mr Glenn Hoddle for successfully leading the England football to defeat, and then writing a book about it, blaming everyone else; Mr Paul Gascoigne for successfully failing to give up alcohol; Mr Michael Owen, for successfully scoring one goal; and Mr Tim Henman for successfully losing in the semi-finals at Wimbledon.

"But easily the winner was **Mr Geoff Borecott**, the heavyweight boxing champion, whose title was upheld by a French court after his successful knock-out of Ms Dolly Slapper."

Mr Borecott then strode angrily to the microphone, accompanied his adviser Mr Max Clifford, to protest: " 'Appen, I've been maligned by t'press and this bloody French magistrate. I'd like to give her a bloody thump on t'nose, that's what I'd like to do..."

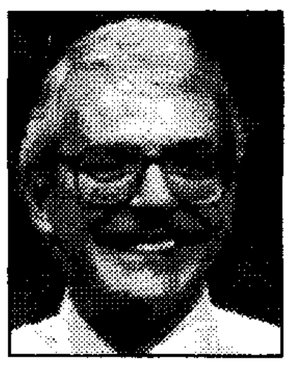
NIGEL PRATT-DUMPSTER

AS THE legendary pugilist droned on, **Miss Carol Boorderman** interrupted to say that, by her calculation, the ceremony had now run out of time, having lasted for 23 days, 4 hours and 46.3 euro-seconds. (This later turned out to be incorrect.)

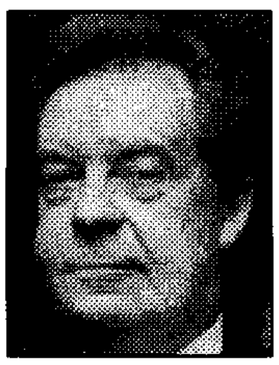
She therefore rattled through all the rest of the awards in the remaining ten seconds, including the new Devolved Scottish and Welsh Awards (**Mr Sean Connery** and **Mr Alun Michael**); the Posthumous Award For Boring Beyond The Grave (**Woodrow Wyfront**); the Most Boring Spy Award (shared between **Mr David "Hello" Shayler**, **Mr Richard "MI6" Tomlinson, Mr Dominic Lawson** and **Miss Pam Ayres**).

She was half-way through the list when the euro-tower was struck by a laser-guided cruise missile aimed at Saddam Hussein's top-secret bunker in Baghdad. As the roof caved in with the collateral damage, a shower of debris cascaded onto the slumbering guests, including the following items: one Ikea chair, as sat in by the Baroness Thatcher; one pair satin tights, formerly the property of Lord Lairgover; 2 million unsold signed copies of Sir Edward Heath's autobiography *Why I Was Always Right*; one tonne of elephant dung, as used in the Turner Prize-winning masterpiece by Mr Chris Offaly; 2 billion digital TV decoders; 10 billion tonnes of unsold Diana, Princess of Wales, memorabilia; and 80 trillion unsold copies of the humorous magazine *Punch*.

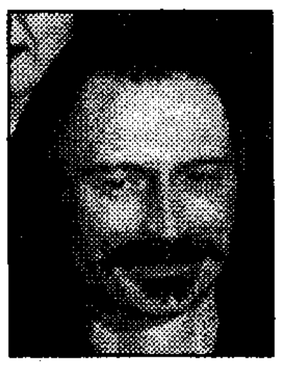
As the dust cleared, a lone figure could be seen in the ruins shouting "Why haven't I got a fuggin' award? It's a fuggin' conspiracy!"



John Major, CH, for services to the Labour Party



Lord Knacker of the Yard, for services to Crime



Sir Fullswell Monty, for services to British Cinema

Nigel Luvvie, for being such a sweetie

New Year's People's Honours

(continued from page one)

PC (First Class)

Ms Judy Boxwallah, Chairwoman Women in Business, for services to Women in Business; Mr Raj Londis-Patel, Chairman Confederation of Asian Commerce, for services to Asian Commerce; Miss Fatima Wondulu (Bronze Medallist, Britain's Women's Sumo Team Commonwealth Games 1998), for services to Women's Sumo; Nigel Luvvie, for being such a sweetie (shurely shome mishtake)

PC (Regional)

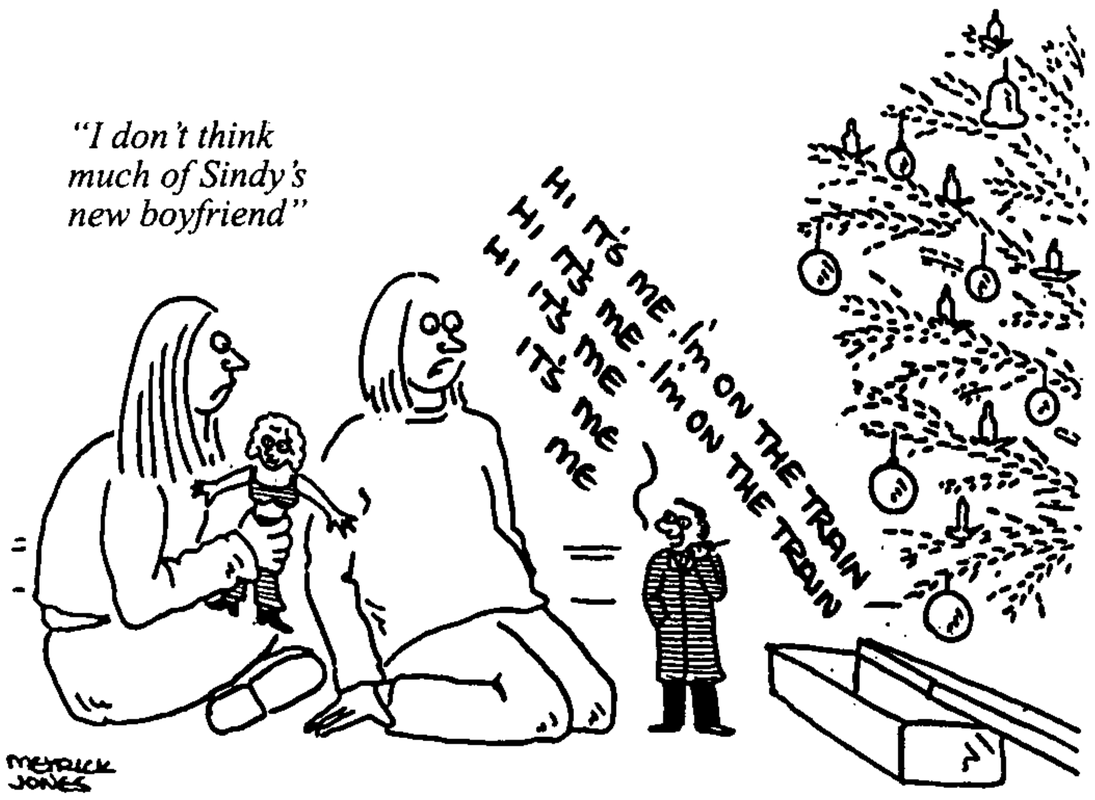
Mr James "Jimmy" Shand, Scottish Musician, for services to being Scottish; Mr Thomas "Tom" Jones, Welsh singer, for services to being Welsh; Ms Garth Spart, Senior Partner Spart, Fenian and Witherspoon, Solicitors and Commissioners for Oaths, for services to the Republican Movement in Ireland.

MOT (Colonial)

Miss Evangelina Sheepshagga, Lollipop Lady, St Margaret's Primary School, Port Stanley; Christian Fletcher-Halfwit, Municipal Gravedigger Pitcairn Cemetery; Mr Alfonzo Baldwin, Chief Superintendent Ape Colony, Gibraltar; Miss Jemima Glendinning, Assistant Curator, The Napoleon Experience Museum, St Helena.

VICTORIAN ORDER RSVP

The Reverend Reginald Arthur Trumpington-Blewett, Senior Chaplain to the Queen Mother (Fridays); Sidney Warburton Greentrouser, Assistant Gardener, the Organic Conservatory, Highgrove; Lady Laetitia Featherstone-Limpett, Keeper of the Royal Beehives, Osborne House; Duncan Fraser McNugget, Chief Grouse Breeder, Balmoral Estate. *(That's enough People's Awards. Ed.)*



Theatre Highlights '98

WHITEHALL THEATRE
The Importance of Being Honest

New production to mark the centenary of famous homosexual dramatist Oscar Mandelson (*"A Dome Of No Importance"*, *"Lady Thatcher's Fan"*). The complex, cunningly-crafted plot involves a web of deceit surrounding "Mandy" and "Geoff", both of whom lead sinister double lives. Having fabricated a completely fictitious figure of "Earnings" (for his Britannia application form), our hero is able to keep up the lavishly louche lifestyle he craves. His portly colleague, meanwhile, is frequently making excuses to slip off to the country (Switzerland — to visit his beloved bank account). Culminating with the classic, unforgettable "A BACKHANDER!?" exchange, the two are finally revealed as being related by mortgage and thereby able to do the recent thing — resign.

Anniversaries to watch out for in 1999

Jan 22nd
Jacomo di Tosta, Italian inventor of the electric egg-whisk, died in Genoa, 1947.

Feb 3rd
Jan Van Der Taabla the Younger, Flemish Painter, born Bruges, 1731.

March 7th
Treaty of Theodoracopulous signed in Constantinople between the Ottoman Emperor, Suleiman the Rushdie, and British Consul, Lord Hartlepool, 1852.

April 30th
First public litter bin installed in Grand Central Station, New York, 1889.

May 4th
William Frederick Deedes, journalist, born in Saltwood, Kent, 1752.

June 17th
Hobo MacGill, legendary American cowboy, died in shoot-out at Jonathan Creek, 1872.

July 7th
First and only performance of "The Peasant and the Ostrich" by Rimsky Monotonov, 1903.

August 12th
Discovery of Lake Kensington (formerly Lake Rumbabwe) in Central Africa by Captain Fergus Barking-Sibthorpe, 1827.

September 19th
"Bo Jangles Hot Lips" Wapshott, Jazz trumpeter and leader of the Cotton Pickin' Dandies, died 1959.

November 22nd
First beard patented by Friedrich von Bristle in Cologne, 1802.

December 29th
Outbreak of space-filling articles like this one in all newspapers, 1998.

Exclusive to all newspapers

Old Moore's Amusing Almanack for 1999

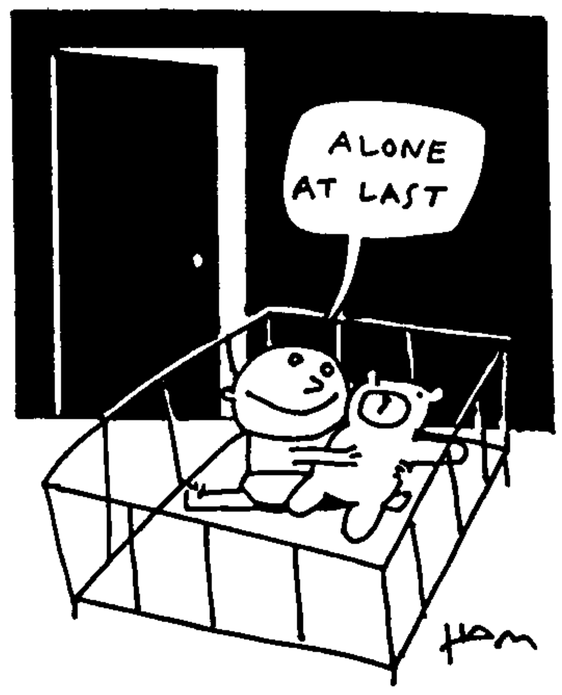
by Phil Space

January

Melinda Messenger becomes Minister Without Portfolio (or Bra!). The entire cabinet resigns because they are gay and cannot bear to sit near her!! General Pinochet beats Michael Owen to become Lord Mayor of London!!!

February

Richard Branson joins the Spice Girls!!! A Furby is to become the new anchorman for the new BBC News!!!! Prince Charles announces his engagement to Melinda Messenger!!!! *(That's enough of this drivel. Ed.)*



DIARY

HAD an audience with Her so-called Majesty the other day. Talk about hoity-toity. "Would you like a cup of tea, Mr Prescott?" she said, all lah-di-bloody-dah.

I'm not taking this, I thought. "I suppose you'll expect me to pour it too?" I exploded. "Well, I'm not a steward any more, so you can wipe the smile off your fat face! Bare-faced cheek! You and your toffee-nosed husband laughing behind my back — don't try and deny it!"

So after full discussions, we devised a system whereby we could sort out this whole tea-pouring nonsense for once and for all. As I could of told you, she may be Queen, but she's no bloody good at arm-wrestling. She poured, I supped. Yes: New Labour delivers.

Come outside and say that, frogface.

I found myself intoning this phrase whilst granting an audience to my opposite number, the Deputy Prime Minister of France.

Let's begin at the not end but instead as is preferable given the circumstances at the other end from the end namely the starting end. No question.

"Louise?" I says upon greeting him, "LOUISE? That's an unusual name for a bloke." No, he says — Lou-eeeeey. Mindful of my office, I stifle my grin in due accordance with the due accords of my office and made him feel at home. "Only kiddin'. Grab a seat, Loueeeey" I says. "But boots off the carpet, if you'd be so kind. How's the garlic and berets, then?"

All goes well until he mentions meeting a Moosyer Mandelson last time he were in town.

"Nope" I say. "No one here of that name. Velly solly. No can do." But he doesn't take the hint so I try to steer the conversation to official matters in hand concerning the official concerns of matters pertaining to those concerns officially in hand. "Here in the UK, we find the Third Way very handy, Lou-eeeey. It's certainly a lot better than the Second Way, and some of us even prefer it to the Fourth or the Fifth Ways. You should try it sometime. Tell you what, give me your address, I'll get you the instructions."

But he keeps going back to the same subject. "And 'ow is your Moosyer Mandelson?" he asks. I hold my bottle for a bit but then something snaps. "Shut it" I say, before inviting him as per above to accompany me to the exterior of the residence in question and sort matters out on a less conversational level vis à vis the matter in question. If there's one thing I've learnt from politics it's this: when you're in my position, you've got to go through the due procedures before biffing your opposite number.

THE RT. HON. JOHN PRESCOTT, PC

Mandelson? Put a sock in it mate. Don't talk to me about Mandelson. I've had him up to here. I wasted the whole pre-Xmas period defending him to the best of my mobility on the media. When it comes to rallying support for an individual, you need a trusty heavyweight like my own good self to muck in, no question.

"That's entirely a matter for Mr Mandelson," I said to Jeremy so-called Paxman. Solid as a rock, that's me. Paxman had asked me if I agreed with his critics that Mandelson was a serial liar and a no-good slimey toad.

Later, when Mandelson had done the decent thing, I was back on the telly, stoutly defending him once more. "And do you, like Mr Blair, hope in due course that Mr Mandelson will be able to regain a position in Government?" I was asked by Jon Snow. This called for all the resources of comradeship I could muster. I moved in, all guns blazing. "That's entirely a matter for the Prime Minister at the time," I retorted. That shut him up. It proved once again that I'm a man of great loyalty: loyalty to my colleagues, loyalty to my party, and perhaps above all loyalty to myself.

What do you know, a few days later, I'm back on the telly, this time working my magic defending Brown's press man, Charlie Whelan. "That's entirely a matter for Mr Brown," I say to Paxman when he asks me whether I think Whelan should go. A day later, he's gone. Magic.

So now I'm back on television, introduced as per rightly as Deputy Prime Minister — nice ring to that title, especially if you drop the first bit — defending Mr Whelan's right to resign. I have a reassuring air about me: old values in a modern world. "Would you agree with those who say Gordon Brown has shown a fatal lack of judgement?" asks Jon Snow.

"I'd prefer to talk about this Government's very real achievements," I riposte. "Let's talk about our tremendous increase in hospital waiting-lists, for instance — or our very real achievements as regards delivering promises. We promised to deliver more promises than ever before, and now we're delivering them — and that's a promise, or will be, once we've delivered it."

"And what about Gordon Brown?"

"Let's talk about waste disposal. Yes, we're delivering on garbage. A dustcart calls at every household at least once a week. Old soup tins, milk cartons, the lot. That's not a bad record on rubbish for this or any government. Frankly, we're delivering more garbage than any other government in this country."

Three days later, and Gordon Brown is still in office. But Rome wasn't built in a day.

Let me make one thing absolutely clear. There's no clarity without absolutality — and that's one thing we can be clear on. So clearly, we've got to make this one thing as absolutely made as you've let me cleared it. Just one thing — but it's one thing on which we are all as far as can be possible given the circumstances and let's make no bones about it — absolutely clear, and if it's made that way, well, let's be clear that this is the thing we would have made had it been absolute, which it is. No government has ever achieved such absolute thing in eighteen months. Of that we can be clear.

Little joke to round it off nicely. "Knock knock." "Who's there?" "Mandy." "Mandy who?" "That's politics for you!" You've got to look on the bright side, haven't you? Or is it just my irrepressible good nature?

LAST night's vote to impeach President Nixon underlines the uncertain future facing both the men who have dominated the news for the past few days.

Sunday Mirror

But the great majority of Chileans — more than 70 per cent, according to the opinion polls — don't really care what has happened to the General; though a similar number would like to see him put on trial somewhere.

Sunday Telegraph

SUPERMODELS
KERBER
YOUNG UP-AND-COMING DESIGN HOUSE
WELL DONE TEAM... THAT'S A GREAT FLEECE!
YEH!
IS THAT THE RIGHT WORD FOR IT?
WELL, IT COSTS A COUPLE OF GRAND
YES, 'FLEECE' IS THE RIGHT WORD!
Fashion Pictionary

Literary Review

Sick characters in search of an author

glamorama
Bret Easton Ellis
(Picador, £16)

So it's, like, 4 A.M. and I'm chilling here in the VIP restaurant, which is so uncool it's kind of cool, and Monica Lewinsky and Liam Gallagher and Bruce Willis and, strangely, Pope John Paul II are ordering salads, while in the background Radiohead, Beck and the Foo Fighters are playing from separate beat boxes. And Chloe, who's looking kind of sweet and sad and wistful, turns to me while the photographers jostle and whinny and says `I can't believe that you're not looking at me', and I say `Sure baby, you're looking very Uma-ish ce soir *y'know.' And Monica, who's been drinking root beer all evening, says `God, this stuff is* so-oh *disgusting.' And I say, `Oh baby, I'm really with you on the root beer thing.' And I've kind of got my dick out and she's kind of responding, and looking very Uma-ish, until a bunch of Puerto Rican guys in Paul Smith suits with tie-pins by LaCroix or possibly Karl Lagerfeld comes in and chainsaws her head off, while we all kind of laugh and chill some more...*

ACTUALLY I am making this up, but never mind: something like it, or a whole lot like it — it's amazing how quickly one acquires Bret Easton Ellis's procedural tics — can be found on nearly every one of *glamorama*'s 482 tightly-packed pages.

Billed as "one of the freshest and most amazing novels of the late twentieth century" (and I'd really like, you know, to sit down and *chat* with the blurbwriter who finessed that formulation into shape), it's inevitably the precise opposite — predictable, glorying in its wants and evasions — and just the kind of thing, in fact, that some thirtysomething Manhattan smartiboots with a track record (this pen brought you *American Psycho*, in case anyone out there forgot) would reckon was kind of appropriate for the pre-millennium party bag.

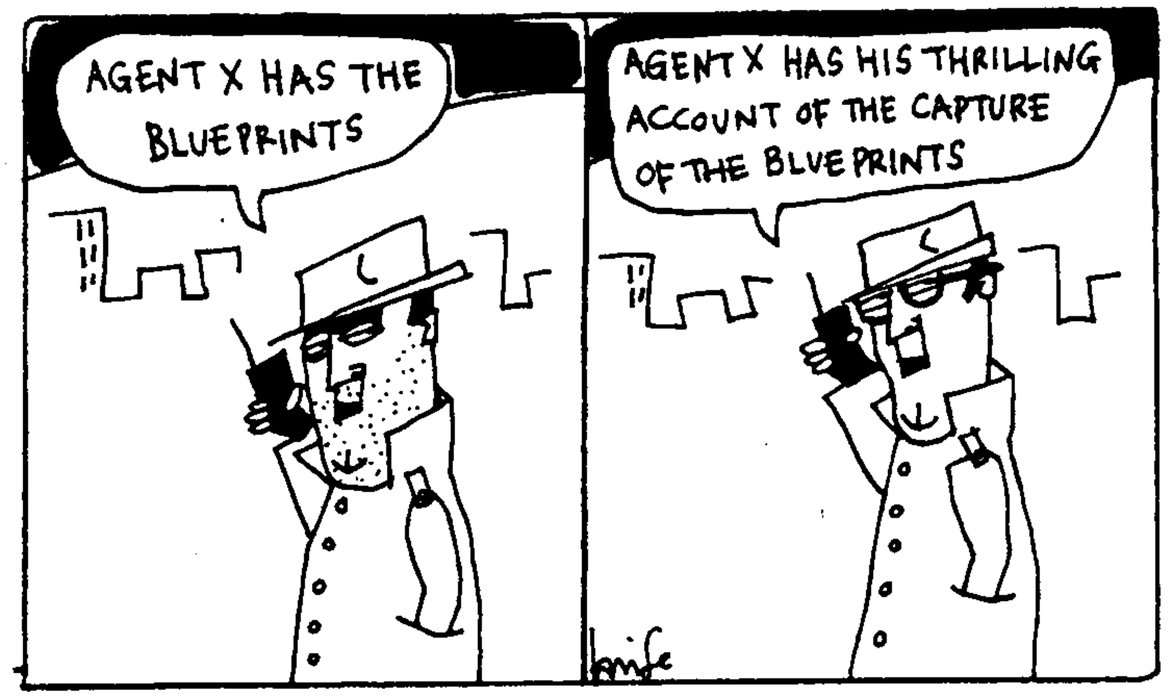
While notionally functioning as a movie camera held over the head of an exceptionally brainless Big Apple "It Boy" (modelling, club-owning, playing in rock band, etc) named Victor, *glamorama* is essentially a book of lists, a sort of late '90s guide *not*, each scene packed out with rosters of the society faithful (God knows what Picador's lawyers made of this), up-to-the-minute resumés of what hip young people are listening to, ingesting, and whacking into their innocent young veins.

This being Bret Easton Ellis, it all gets incredibly nasty — aimings, blamings, maimings and so on — not to mention banal. I mean, is Victor, who seems to fetch up as a catspaw in some vast multinational conspiracy, walking around in real life or just flickering in some kind of celluloid murk? Or — get this for intellectual sophistication, dude — *are the lines between them blurred?* These young people, I mean, where *do* they get their ideas?

There are cultural savants out there, regular guys with degrees and slots in the posh papers, who will tell you that this is, uh, satire — a deathless, cataclysmic "statement" on the excesses and moral nullity of the late twentieth century US urban catwalk. Forget it, and them. Satire works best in a society where there are generally accepted behavioural standards, at a pinch in one where these yardsticks are just beginning to fall apart. The deadheads gathered here wouldn't know they were being pissed on if you advertised the fact on placards outside Macey's, but — and this is the point — neither would most of the punters from whom they make their living.

Then there's the problem of the particular constituency whose style options old EE here is addressing — the kind that actually goes to all these groovy places and listens to all this fag music — a fragment of humanity so rarefied and bewildering, governed by such peculiar codes, that the only guarantee of authenticity is, ah, the author's.

About half-way through, Victor finds himself involved in a five-page hardcore sex scene, written up in EE's usual heavy-duty affectless prose and simply a procession of anatomical details. I wondered about this for a long time. It could have been lifted straight out of some glistening contact mag. Not parody, you understand, as there's no distancing, no faint, barely heard detonation of moral separateness, but


SECRET AGENT
LITERARY AGENT
AGENT X HAS THE BLUEPRINTS
AGENT X HAS HIS THRILLING ACCOUNT OF THE CAPTURE OF THE BLUEPRINTS
lonfe

mimicry. In which case why do it? Or why not do it in a medium whose beetle-browed purchasers will properly appreciate it?

As it happens this is *glamorama*'s problem throughout — the sense that anybody (anybody armed with the appropriate New Yawk style and music directories, that is) could have written it. Limbs blown off in Technicolor and nobody cares — I mean, *I* can do that dude, although I don't know that I'd want to for 482 screaming pages.

Real writers write about character, not its absence, and if the absence is the point then they do it better than this. And while the spectre of nationalism is usually better left buried in these appreciations, it should be stressed that this is not simply a piece of crap but a piece of *American* crap — a distinction not always appreciated by critics trying to account for some of the seismic failures and disturbances of the western novel today.

Books & Bookmen

COMING SOON...

TWO or three years ago the books page editors hit on a failsafe way to fill space in the dead, bookless gap between Christmas and new year: the "What's new in 199-" feature.

This year's offerings, common to all newspapers, had a depressing air of uniformity. After the conspicuously limp display of novels brought to the public by famous names in 1998, the word on the street is that '99 will be a vintage year with Salman Rushdie, Peter Ackroyd, Roddy Doyle and Co all due to produce. Unfortunately Salman's *The Ground Beneath Her* (April) is about an opera singer consumed by an earthquake, while Ackers' *The Plato Papers*, booked for the same month, is a sci-fi epic set 2,000 years in the future, so don't hold your breath. The Roddy Doyle, meanwhile, is so provisional no one has even come up with a title. And a jolly-sounding offering by Howard Jacobson called *Getting Licked* promises to be about, dear me, "sex and table tennis".

The non-fiction ends of the catalogues, meantime, are awash with the most eyelid-lowering treats. John Major's memoirs, anyone? David Mellor's ditto? Germaine Greer's *The Whole Woman*? The overwhelming air of sell-by dates irretrievably passed is compounded by advance warning of yet another biography of... Peter Mandelson.

"My next book will be called: 'A walk, laughing, all the way to the bank'"

■ BOOKSHOPS in London have been puzzled by the number of people returning copies of Richard Branson's autobiography, stating that they are "unwanted Christmas presents" and demanding the £20 cover price back. The skinflints turn out to be employees of Virgin Retail, who were generously given copies of *Losing My Virginity* by their boss for Christmas. Some people are so ungrateful!

'Bookworm'

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
I TOOK THE MARGARET COOK BOOK ON HOLIDAY...
....GOT TO THE AIRPORT, DUMPED IT, AND WENT OFF WITH SOMETHING ELSE
DUTY FREE
FLIGHTS TO GENEVA
MARGARET COOK MY STORY
JACKIE COLLINS
BEARDED MEN -THEY'RE ALL THE SAME!
ITTER

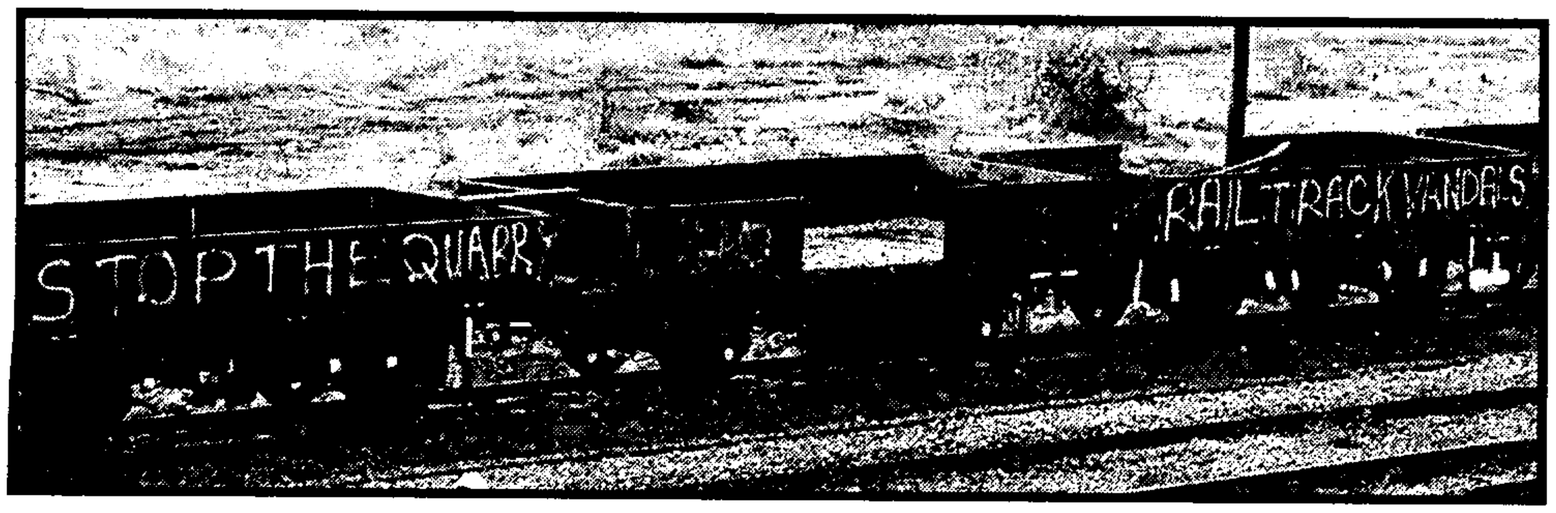
LUVVIES

I fill some void. I am the void that fills the void. That's why I am so interested in architecture. Because it is something I can do on my own and no one can interfere.

BRAD PITT
Telegraph

footnotes

QUARRYING FAVOUR



IF ANY ordinary private company had wanted planning permission to turn a vast tract of peaceful green belt countryside into a dust-ridden and noisy dump for stone and gravel quarried from all over the country, it wouldn't have stood a chance.

But Railtrack, the new commercial owner of all the railway land previously owned by the nationalised British Rail, is blithely going ahead with just such a "virtual quarry" in the green belt at Hinksey, South Oxford. The entire local community is furiously opposed to the project and all the noise, dust and traffic it has brought to the area. In a debate in the Commons on 16 December, local MP Evan Harris described Railtrack's arrogant contempt for the protesters as "appalling".

Railtrack hasn't applied for planning permission because it doesn't need to. Like all the other privatised undertakings, it inherited from its nationalised predecessors something called "permitted development rights". This means that it can do what it likes on land it owns, including green belt land, without paying the slightest attention to planning rules to which everyone else is subject.

This immunity was afforded to nationalised companies because they were not making dividends for shareholders and were directly accountable to parliament. The new privatised monopolies like Railtrack *are* making dividends for shareholders, and they are not directly accountable to parliament. Yet, just because they were once publicly-owned, they can do what they like on green belt land.

Impressed by the extent of public protest and desperate to stop the development, Oxfordshire county council issued an "article 4 direction" to force Railtrack to submit to the planning rules. This direction has to be approved by the secretary of state for the environment, transport and regions, John Prescott. The omens are bleak.

Replying to the December debate, Nick Raynsford, parliamentary under secretary, spoke up boldly for the rights of the new private monopolies to trample all over the planning regulations. "It would be in nobody's interest," he said, "to require the submission of a planning application every time development was proposed, no matter how small or insignificant."

Raynsford seemed to miss the point that the Hinksey quarry is neither small nor insignificant. Nor did he consider the argument that if it is "in nobody's interest" to submit planning applications for such a development on green belt land, why have planning laws at all?

SUE, GRABINER & RUNNE

CONFLICT of interest never caused much trouble at Lloyd's, the London insurance market... not until Lloyd's "names" lost untold billions in asbestosis and pollution claims in the 1980s.

Determined to turn over a new leaf and start making fortunes for the "names" all over again, Lloyd's gathered up £15bn and bunged it into a completely new organisation called Equitas, which was ringfenced from Lloyd's.

Equitas was lumbered with all the old claims and Lloyd's carried on making money out of new business. Everyone agreed that the interests of the two organisations clashed sharply. For instance, it suits existing Lloyd's names if bogus or partly bogus claims are paid off by Equitas, but such generosity obviously doesn't suit Equitas.

A good example of the strenuous efforts to keep the two conflicting organisations entirely separate is their choice of lawyers. Lloyd's has always used the services of Freshfields, while Equitas uses, er, Freshfields. In a letter to a name on 11 November, Gisela Gledhill, Equitas company secretary, disclosed that her board was "sensitive to possible conflict concerns" but insisted that the best interests of Equitas could best be served by Freshfields.

She gave an assurance that "the respective Freshfields teams were scrupulously careful to safeguard the interests of their clients". As for silk, Lloyd's has consistently benefited from the expertise of the distinguished commercial QC Anthony Grabiner. In her letter, Gisela Gledhill disclosed the name of a barrister who "has been consulted on a few occasions since Equitas became operational on matters concerning the reinsurance transaction and documentation relating thereto". His name? Anthony Grabiner QC.

Pinochet's dirty pics

GENERAL Pinochet's distaste for British Labour governments dates back to the Wilson government of 1975, which formally condemned the Chilean government for abuses of human rights.

Pinochet promptly sent his trusted security services agent Virgilio Paz to take secret photographs of high-security prisons in Northern Ireland.

Pinochet's aim was to hand the photos out at the United Nations general assembly, along with a statement condemning Britain for its human rights record. But the photographs arrived too late and the best the dictator's agents could do was to get them printed in an article attacking the British government in *El Mercurio*, a Spanish-language newspaper published in Santiago.

LICKISS BUM (cont.)

ALL those years ridiculing the Tory government's quangos have not deterred Labour ministers from setting up some quangos of their own. Perhaps the most influential are the new regional development agencies (RDAs).

The chairman of the South West RDA, which covers Bristol and Plymouth, has been named as Sir Michael Lickiss, knighted under the Tories in 1993 for "services to accountancy". *Eye* readers (846 and 850) will recall Sir Michael in his role as chairman of an exciting new venture for training accountants called ATV.

Though the project had the support of the Institute of Chartered Accountants (past president: Sir Michael Lickiss), there was never enough money in the bank to cover its liabilities and accounts were never filed. Very few people joined, and after 18 months ATV went into receivership owing a couple of million pounds.

The disaster did nothing to hold up Sir Michael's onward march. In the year ATV collapsed (1994) he became chairman of the Edexcel Foundation (previously BTEC) and non-executive director of United News and Media PLC. He was also a member of an influential quango, the Further Education Funding Council, and in 1996 became a governor of the LSE and vice-chairman of the board of Plymouth University.

LICKISS

Sir Michael's new job chairing the South West RDA will bring him £185 a day.

Another member of the RDA is Helen Holland, who chairs the planning committee at Bristol city council. She also chairs the Bristol Regeneration Partnership and something trendily called @t Bristol, a partnership between the council and private industry which is "driving through" a grotesque millennium project at Canon's Marsh. The scheme has been attacked as "wholly inappropriate" by English Heritage, which has objected to every part of it. How did it get planning permission?

HOLLAND

Don't ask Helen Holland, who is also vice chair of the city's central area planning committee, which gave permission for Canon's Marsh. A city council spokeswoman tells the *Eye*: "She declares an interest and sits out of any debate involving @t Bristol."

Footnotes continues overleaf ☛

High Principals

A DUFF ANSWER

WHAT on earth is going on at UNECIA, the Universities of England Consortium for International Activities, which was founded with great fanfare nine years ago by 10 of England's top universities: Bradford, Hull, Keele, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Salford, Sheffield and York?

All these ancient institutions pride themselves on open governance and freedom of information, but none can offer a word to explain how and why the two top officials of UNECIA have suddenly and mysteriously been thrown out of their offices.

In November the *Eye* heard that Dr John Padley, former long-serving and disciplinarian registrar of Sheffield University, who had only been in his top post at UNECIA for a few months, had been removed from his offices and the locks changed. The same fate, we understood, had befallen UNECIA's former chief executive Gill Monaghan.

Sheffield University obdurately refused to comment on the matter and referred inquiries to Eddie Newcombe, registrar of Manchester University. On 2 December the *Eye* asked Mr Newcombe about Dr Padley's alleged eviction. There was no reply. A phone call to Mr Newcombe's office several days later drew a free and open answer from his secretary: "Oh, yes, that — he doesn't want to comment on it."

On 14 December the *Eye* faxed Dr Peter Duff who, we are told, is now in charge at UNECIA's spanking new Sheffield offices. The questions were very simple: had Dr Padley and Mrs Monaghan been removed and if so, why? Once again, no reply.

In the deafening silence from the authorities, the following facts may be of interest.

1 Gill Monaghan was personal assistant to Dr Padley during his reign as registrar at Sheffield University. Her appointment at UNECIA owed a lot to Dr Padley's vigorous recommendation.

2 Mrs Monaghan's husband runs a prominent Sheffield quantity surveying firm called the Monaghan Partnership, which has had several contracts from Sheffield University.

WIRRAL: GOING ON A WINTER HOLIDAY

ANOTHER of "new" Labour's favourite high principals has fallen.

Eighteen months ago the *Eye* highlighted the appointment of Jenny Shackleton, principal of Wirral Metropolitan College, as a member of David Blunkett's taskforce for getting young people off welfare and into work.

The appointment seemed strange in view of the heated controversy in the Wirral over the closure of the college's site at Wallasey. Twenty thousand people had signed a petition protesting at the closure and the end of 100 years' further education in Wallasey.

In 1996 Wallasey's MP Angela Eagle secured a promise from David Blunkett that he would review the closure if he became secretary of state for education. When he got the job, Blunkett held a review and concluded there was absolutely nothing he could do to stop the closure. Then he appointed Jenny Shackleton to his taskforce (*Eye* 930). Controversy in the area grew even more heated in May last year when the principal announced the closure of another part of the college, Carlett Park (*Eyes* 949, 950).

There was much indignation from Ms Shackleton and her supporters in the local Liberal Democrat party at the *Eye*'s treatment of these matters. But the college's debts continued to rise and, most mysteriously, Wirral did not appear in the list of college accounts for 1997-98 published by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

Shortly before Christmas the college was rocked by the surprise announcement that Jenny Shackleton was taking early retirement. The announcement was not publicly connected to the fact that on the very day of the principal's announcement the chairman of the governors, Lib Dem councillor Gordon Lindsay, and chief executive Chris Allen travelled to the headquarters of the FEFC at Coventry. The urgency of the visit was emphasised by the fact that the men's train broke down and the clerk to the college governors had to meet them at Runcorn and drive them to Coventry. The two men arrived at the FEFC at 11.40am, and the resignation of the principal was announced at 12 noon. An FEFC spokesman assured the *Eye* that the timing was "purely coincidental".

GONE: Jenny Shackleton

FOR WHOM BELL TOLLS

BELL COLLEGE, Hamilton, Scotland, also runs a nasty deficit despite substantial grants from the European social fund. The principal, Dr K. MacCallum, who took office in May 1997, has been doing his best to remedy the finances in the usual way — ie by sacking people.

His attempts to sack 10 staff last May were stopped when union officials pointed out the sackings would be illegal. Another attempt in October to change pay and conditions for the entire staff was similarly aborted.

There has, however, been one significant sacking. Shortly before Christmas Michael Morris, head of the prestigious department of communication and journalism who has taught at the college for 26 years, was sacked for "gross misconduct".

The college is reluctant to elaborate. But the *Hamilton Advertiser* on Christmas Eve suggested Morris's crime was to have bought a computer and mobile phone for his department without proper authorisation. The paper also quotes a college source saying: "It is thought that Mick was sacked because he campaigned for more openness in the management of the college." What could that mean?

Death by Stagecoach

A STAGECOACH bus has killed again. On 14 December Frank Dean, 41, a bus driver, was picketing Blackburn bus depot during an official strike when he was crushed to death by a bus driven by a strike-breaker.

Brian Souter, chairman and mastermind of Stagecoach, the chief beneficiary of bus privatisation, continually brags of his trade union past and commitment. He was guest speaker at the Scottish Trades Union Congress in 1997, where he wowed the delegates by singing a hilarious skit on the Labour anthem *The Red Flag*. His enthusiasm for the unions, however, does not prevent him from breaking official strikes.

A long pay dispute at Stagecoach Ribble, the privatised subsidiary of the old publicly-owned National Bus Company in the north-west, culminated last autumn in a ballot of the company's bus workers at Blackburn, Bolton, Clitheroe, Chorley, Burnley and Fleetwood. Eighty eight percent voted for industrial action, and four one-day official strikes were legally declared. For the first of these, on 14 December, Stagecoach flooded the areas with bus drivers from all over the country, most of them non-union, many of them inspectors. These drivers were hired to break the strike which involved crossing the strikers' picket lines at the depot. An inspector was driving the bus which killed Frank Dean.

Police are investigating the incident and an inquest is pending. A local union official who, significantly, asked not to be named for fear of victimisation, told the *Eye* that the hiring of drivers from outside the area is the usual reaction of Stagecoach to any strike. A spokesman for the London PR firm which handles press inquiries about Stagecoach would not comment on the incident. He said the company had a statutory duty to run school buses and that the company's pay offer had been approved nationally by the Transport and General Workers' Union.

UNION MAN: Brian Souter

MANDARINS' LUCK

IN THE olden days if you took a pay-off and enhanced pension for early retirement from government service, you could hardly expect to be taken on almost at once for other work paid for by the government. How times have changed!

Within the last year Pamela Denham, the director and most senior official of the government offices in the north-east, and her deputy Bob Wilkinson took early retirement. They got handsome lump sum pay-offs and enhanced pension packages.

Now the department of trade and industry (DTI), one of the government departments over which they presided in Newcastle, is carrying out an audit of ACAS, its arbitration agency. Two people have been hired at the usual high consultancy rates to do the job: er, Pamela Denham and Bob Wilkinson.

A DTI spokesman told the *Eye*: "They are eminently suitable for carrying out this kind of review. Their work is not expected to last longer than three months."

You can write to Paul Foot at 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG, or leave a message for him on 0171 287 3183

In the City

HOW did Geoffrey Robinson afford to be so generous to his new best friends in the Labour government?

This unanswered question threatens further embarrassment to those warring nextdoor neighbours in Downing Street. For the answer is not simply that Robinson is a wealthy man. He is — but not *that* wealthy and probably not as cash-rich as the Mandelson loan/gift might suggest.

However, lucky Geoffrey knew a woman who was — Belgian millionairess Joska Bourgeois — and who left the biggest part of her fortune to him, held mostly, it would seem, through the offshore Orion Trust, shortly before he began his lending, spending spree.

Whether a tax-free inheritance from an offshore fund set up in a tax haven by a foreign tax exile indirectly funded "new" Labour is something only Robinson knows and Tony Blair and Gordon Brown must increasingly worry about.

Consider the Robinson financial facts.

Until he sold Midlands engineers Transfer Technology in a deal designed to enrich both himself and his business partner, the pension pillager Robert Maxwell, Robinson was merely comfortable in wealth terms. But his money was locked up in a private company. And the April 1991 sale to the company that became TransTec unlocked only part of that money. To be precise £1m in cash — before 40 percent tax which could have greatly reduced that sum as the likely base value of his TT shares for capital gains purposes may have been just £200,000. The £6.25m balance remained in paper: TransTec shares.

Robinson twice raised money from TransTec share sales. In November 1991 he sold 350,000 shares for £1.006m and in June 1992 he cashed in the rights to new shares for £1.26m. But in November 1994 he ploughed £1.016m back, buying more shares. That leaves a further net £1.25m before tax at 40 percent on much of that gain which could have left at best £750,000 to £1m.

But Robinson also had $1m (£830,000 at the then exchange rate) locked up in a loan to the American company Roll Center which he sold to TransTec for £100,000 in early 1992. That loan, which may have been interest free, had to be left in as part of the deal. It was not repaid until last year.

Robinson also received a substantial dividend income from his 18 percent of TransTec. This was probably between £300,000 and £400,000 a year after tax at 40 percent for each year from 1994.

Robinson also paid himself well until TransTec's City shareholders forced him to become non-executive chairman from 1995. His pay packet had been £150,000 a year. It dropped to below £50,000.

So the Labour fairy godfather was hardly hurting and was clearly able to stack away substantial sums for his retirement. But Robinson also had a high burn-rate lifestyle to support. Two Lutyens mansions, bought, it seems, without the need for mortgages or since repaid, plus a Park Lane penthouse and the Tuscan villa acquired in 1992.

Robinson and his opera loving wife also lived in a style appropriate for a man whose shares by 1996 were worth more than £21m.

Assuming Robinson had made other successful investments from the money TransTec made him, he could well have afforded to donate generously to the Labour party and probably did so. But it appears remarkably coincidental that the most expansive stage of his largesse follows the death of his Belgian benefactor, whose financial affairs he had guided, in October 1994 and the formation of the Orion Trust in late 1995 or early 1996. Robinson was not only a major beneficiary but also for a time an executor of the Bourgeois fortune which was estimated at up to £35m of which his share was said to be at least a third.

Let's look at the post 1995 record.

In February 1996 Robinson acquired the heavily loss-making *New Statesman* and soon loaned the Blair-backing magazine more than £1m. By May this year that loan seems to have risen to £2.3m and the company's combined losses now exceed £3m.

Within three months Robinson had the cheque book out again. He loaned £5m interest free for five years to Coventry City after "suggesting" the Orion Trust buy a 26 percent share stake.

But in August 1996, when TransTec made a big rights issue, Robinson told the board he was unable to take up his full entitlement which cost £10.1m. Instead he once again "suggested" the ever helpful Orion Trust step in to prevent his stake being seriously diluted even though this appears to involve obtaining a loan for all or part of the purchase from Credit Suisse. These shares are now worth a third of the estimated purchase price of almost £11m.

The TransTec deal netted an £880,000 profit for Stenbell — which acquired the rights from Robinson and sold the shares to Orion in September 1996. That money Robinson says went to help fund the *New Statesman*. He was also funding Stenbell to which he had loaned £190,000 by the time he became a minister in May 1997. Stenbell has ceased business. Its role in helping the *New Statesman* appears to have been taken over by the Midland Bank, Robinson's longtime bankers, who took a charge on the magazine company's assets in October.

Then between October 1996 and March 1997 Robinson answered Peter Mandelson's cry for help and loaned/gave him £373,000 taking no immediate security, annual interest or fixed repayment date. As the interest was being rolled up Robinson would face a large tax bill when it was finally repaid — if it ever was without the sale of the house. Not many successful businessmen get where they are by deals like that... unless there are anticipated non-financial benefits. If the £373,000 had been on deposit — surprising if true — Robinson was giving up more than £20,000 interest.

Just how remarkably generous the Mandelson loan was can be further assessed by comparing it with Robinson's dividends that year from TransTec — around £330,000 after tax. The Orion Trust received another £290,000 tax free. However, the trust also received £371,000 tax free in June 1997 from the sale of Coventry City shares. No doubt another coincidence.

However, these giveaway terms may ensure Mandelson faces no problems from the Britannia building society who lent him the other £150,000 to buy his Notting Hill dream. As Robinson — unlike the building society — took no charge and charged no interest the Britannia was not at risk and has suffered no loss. Even on an MP's pittance Mandelson can still afford the repayments and on a sale the Britannia takes first bite.

But Robinson's spending spree was still not over. In November 1996 Robinson began pouring up to £200,000 over the next several months into the Smith Political Economy Unit enabling his new best friend Gordon Brown to afford the best and the brightest in windfall and corporation tax advice free of charge and without the lawyers and accountants concerned knowing they were helping form Labour policy.

New Statesman, Coventry City, Stenbell, Mandelson, Smith Political Economy Unit. The total amount loaned or provided by Robinson since early 1996 approaches £8m from which he has received little or no return apart from Mandelson's £40,000 capital reduction payment. That's not so much generosity as charity on such a scale as to raise questions about how and why it could be afforded.

Robinson should once again be pressed to answer questions about the offshore trust of which he is only a discretionary beneficiary such as:

1 How much is in the Orion Trust, what assets does it own and were there other Bourgeois gifts?

2 How much has he or his family received in tax-free payments from the trust?

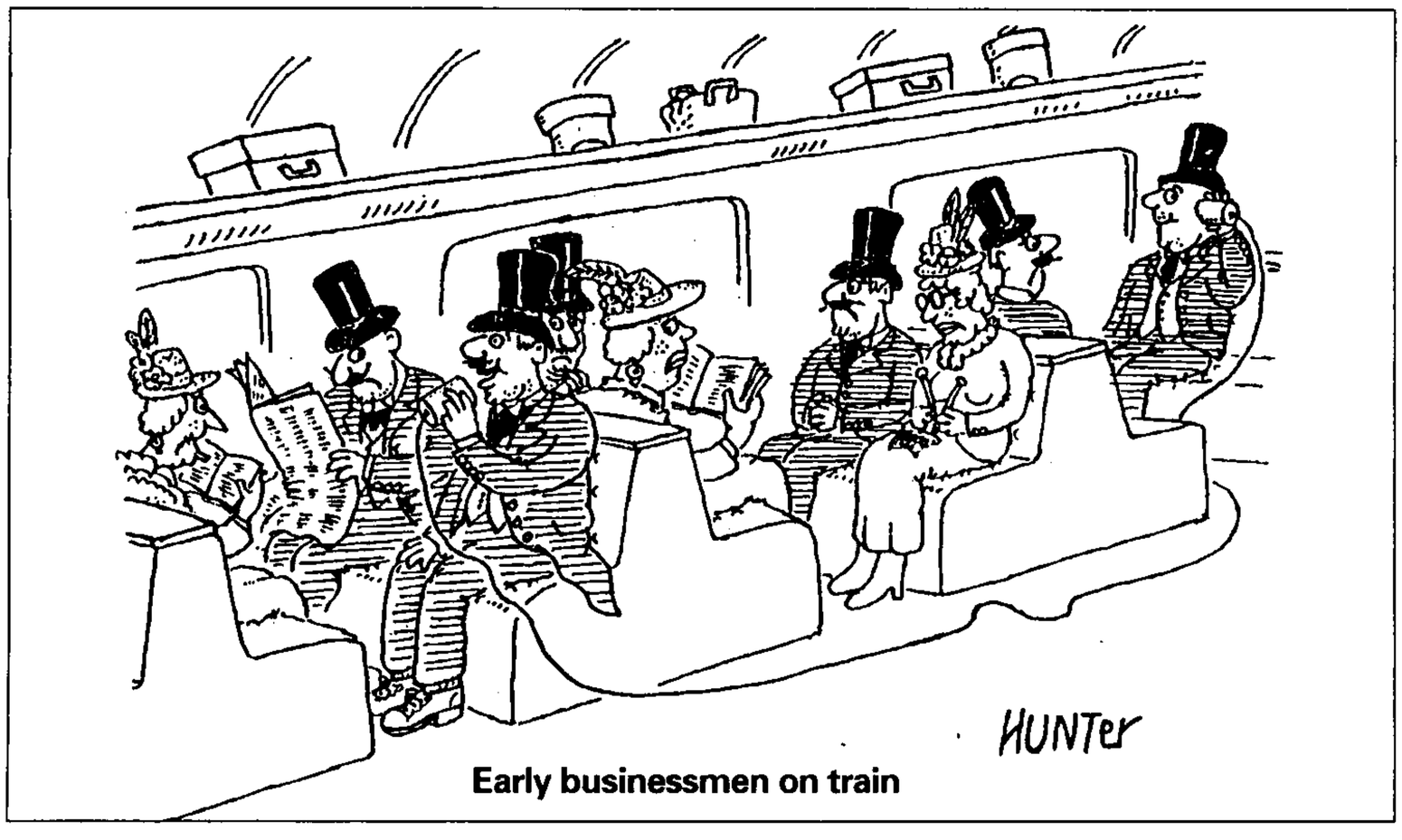
3 How much has he given in political donations or other financial support to the Labour Party since Blair became leader and he became a player?

4 Has any of the money received from the trust or Mme Bourgeois been used by him to fund any of his generous gestures to New Labour?

5 How often and at what cost has he provided hospitality to Labour figures at his homes in London, Surrey, Hampshire, Cannes (courtesy of the bountiful Mme Bourgeois) and Tuscany?

His most prominent guests, Messrs Blair and Brown, must be hoping their host continues to stay silent and does not repay their recent ingratitude by disclosing what he knows. The details in the former treasury minister's little black book might not only have kept him in office for a year past his sack-by date, following disclosure of the Orion Trust's existence. It might also encourage no action — anyway par for the course — by the Department of Timidity & Inactivity over all those suggested companies act breaches.

But what happens if after that a bitter Geoffrey Robinson decides to say goodbye to politics and join the Orion Trust offshore where he would forever be able to enjoy its goodies tax free while revenging himself on those who dashed the dreams he spent so much to achieve?



Early businessmen on train

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Newcomer of the Year A collective award to those directors of engineers Matbro and Powerscreen who would or could not add up almost £50m in phoney profits.

Comeback of the Year Former bucket shop pirate Tom Wilmot who proved you can't keep a bad man down by pillaging car security firm Skynet twice over.

Escaper of the Year A joint award to Richard Gee for confirming the law is different for judges accused of fraud; and former British & Commonwealth chairman John Gunn who proved that chief executives too can be helpless, know nothing victims.

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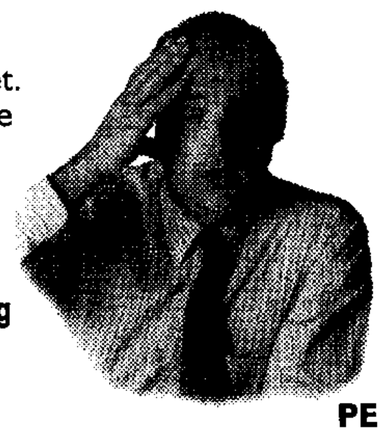

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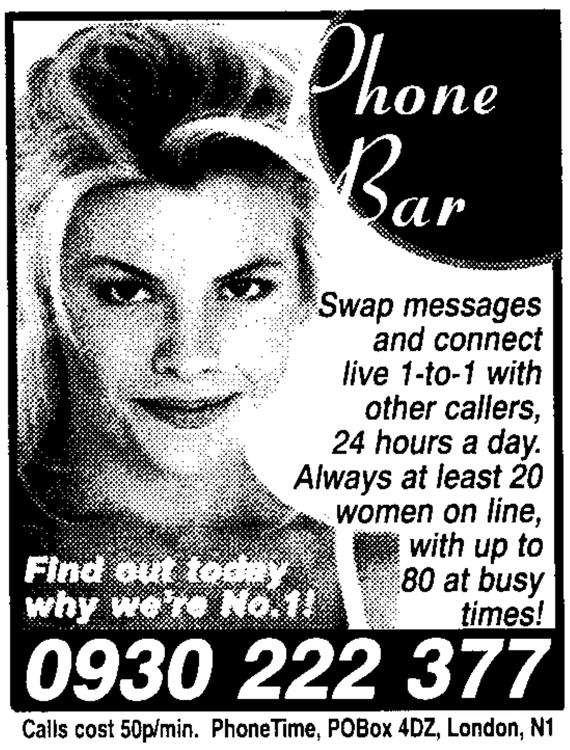
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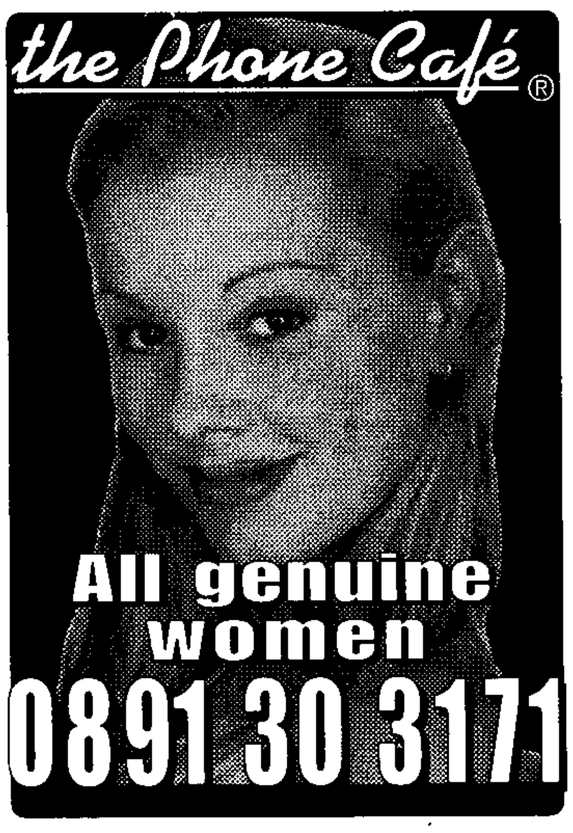

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